University of Chester

# Being in-between: a narrative investigation into manager identity work in a UK Housing Association

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

**Ali Rostron**

June 2016

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people and in particular the following:

To the CEO, managers and staff at ‘Panorama Housing’ for welcoming me into their organisation and particularly the twenty one managers whose stories are shared here;

To my supervisory team, Steve Page and Professor Phil Harris, for emotional support, intellectual challenge and great coffee;

To present and former colleagues at Chester Business School and particularly Dr Kate Black, Dr Russell Warhurst and Dr Tom Williams for helping me to believe that I could do it too;

To the members of the Identity Special Interest Group at the British Academy of Management, and particularly Dr Sandra Corlett, Dr Peter McInnes and Professor Christine Copeland for their insightful, challenging and constructive comments on early presentations of my findings;

To Chris Hampshire for sharing the PhD journey with unwavering humour, practical wisdom and discounted pizza;

To my parents, Dr John Rostron and Dr Margaret Rostron for proof-reading and IT support services, and for reminding me that it is possible to complete a PhD without access to a word processor or the internet;

To my examiners, Professor David Sims, Professor Andrea Whittle and Dr Tony Wall, for their invaluable and constructive critique and recommendations;

Finally to Jo, for everything.

## Abstract: ‘In-between’: a narrative investigation into manager identity work in a UK Housing Association

By Ali Rostron

This thesis uses narrative methods within a social constructivist paradigm to investigate the identity work of managers in a North West England Housing Association, in the context of being ‘in-between’ those whom they directly manage, and those whom they are managed by. Within the complex field of identity studies it draws on a narrative conceptualisation of identity and utilises methods based on narrative structural analysis and the work of Propp (1968), and on a Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) concept of mythical thought.

The thesis is based on an embedded case study strategy in which managers are regarded as individual units of analysis within the bounded system of the case organisation. Data was collected primarily by eliciting stories from managers through interviews, and from observation and document collection over a fifteen month period. The case study organisation is a registered provider of social housing in the North West of England. Management in social housing is an under-studied area, and the complex environment, which makes multiple demands on managers to be both business and socially focused makes it an ideal context in which to investigate manager identity work.

The thesis proposes the concept of the ‘medial manager’ as any organisational actor who is both managed themselves and who manages others. Its focus therefore extends from first level supervisors or team leaders through middle managers to senior managers reporting to Executive Board level. It makes a number of contributions to knowledge. First, a conceptual model of medial manager identity is developed through reflexive abductive iteration between primary data and extant literature which allows underlying processes of identity work to be identified, and understanding of identity work to be developed in several ways. These include identifying three distinct but inter-dependent phases of identity work, identifying key affording and constraining factors which help to explain different responses to subject positions by managers, and a more detailed understanding of the role of narrative in identity work. Second, the thesis adds to our understanding of managers. It reveals that the tensions between different interests commonly attributed to the middle manager role are also part of the daily experience of managers at other levels, and perhaps especially at team leader level. Third, the thesis makes a methodological contribution by developing a method of story elicitation and narrative analysis which is shown to be capable of revealing rich and granular detail into the workplace identities and processes of identity work accomplished by medial managers.

## Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed: .....

Early drafts of some findings have been published in the following papers, which are significantly developed in this thesis:

Rostron, A., Page, S., & Harris, P. (2013) Managing difference? A contemporary workplace perspective on manager identity issues. Paper presented at the British Academy of Management Conference. University of Liverpool.

Rostron, A. (2014). Telling tales, weaving webs: Investigating first-level manager identities through story elicitation. Paper presented at the British Academy of Management Conference. University of Belfast.

Rostron, A. (2014) Imagination, fiction and real life: revitalising the interview in identity studies. Proceedings of the 13th European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies, 315-321. Reading, UK. Academic Conferences and Publishing International Limited.

Rostron, A. (2014). The long brown path before me: Story elicitation and analysis in identity studies. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods 12(2)*, 96-106

Rostron, A. (2015) Heroes and Helpers, Victims and Villains: a syntagmatic analysis of manager stories. Paper presented at the British Academy of Management Conference. University of Portsmouth.

# Table of Contents

# List of tables

# List of figures

# List of abbreviations

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

HA – Housing Association (synonymous with RSL)

OD – Operations Director

PI – Performance Indicator

RSL – Registered Social Landlord (also known as Registered Provider of Social Housing – synonymous with HA)

SM – Service Manager

TL – Team Leader

VFM – Value for Money

# Chapter 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the identity work of managers in a UK Housing Association, with a specific focus on their organisational position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible. This chapter introduces the background to the choice of research topic and justifies its value as a contribution to an important field of study. It sets out the research aim and objectives, the context in which the research was carried out and provides an overview of each chapter. Finally the chapter summarise the ways in which the research findings contribute to knowledge.

## 1.2 Background to the study

This thesis is underpinned both theoretically and methodologically by narrative, and so it is appropriate to start with a story.

Nearly ten years ago I joined a local authority as a team manager. I worked in a large, open-plan office which meant that I was able to observe and overhear the adjacent team and its two team leaders. That team had a reputation within the service for being 'challenging' and 'old-school': they were unionised, saw themselves as more skilled and doing a more demanding job than their peers, were keen to protect their established ways of working and were occasionally confrontational. Nevertheless, the two team leaders had a generally good working relationship with them, and saw themselves as having an important role in slowly introducing and promoting changes to align the team with the service area's increasing drive for performance improvements and more 'professional' ways of working. The team leaders' own line manager had been on long-term sick leave, and they had only been minimally managed in his absence, but about six weeks after I had joined the line manager returned. It soon became apparent that disagreements and conflicts were arising between him and the two team leaders, not least because the team leaders increasingly complained to me (as a peer) about his actions. They felt that he was trying to impose changes too quickly and undoing the trust that the team leaders had established with the team; worse, they complained that he did not consult with them but took decisions on his own. The situation came to a head when

the line manager announced a significant change to work practices at a team meeting in front of the team leaders but without having told them beforehand. From that point on the team leaders stopped trying to positively promote changes on the line manager's behalf and increasingly began to take up the objections and complaints of the staff.

I had no direct involvement in the events other than as a confidante but I intuitively felt that the incident represented something interesting and important about being a manager, although I was not sure exactly what that might be. About that time I started studying a part time MBA, and when I came to research my dissertation two years later, I returned to the incident. As I reflected again on the events I had observed, this time with the benefit of two years' academic study, and as I started to explore what I thought might be relevant management literature, two key themes started to emerge with potential explanatory value. The first was that of plurality and competing organisational interests: the team leaders were precariously positioned between the interests of their team and the interests of the service area and the organisation. The second, which I stumbled upon almost by chance, was that of identity. It seemed to me that identity (which I then only loosely grasped) might explain some of the conversations I had had with the team leaders: they had seen themselves as junior managers acting in the interests of the organisation, but this identity had been challenged and undermined by their line manager's assumption that they were his vicarious instruments. They had therefore started to develop alternative identities as representatives of their team. These tentative ideas and concepts became the basis for a successful master's dissertation.

This thesis builds on the nascent concepts and research which formed that dissertation. In doing so, it brings together two important and current areas of research. Organisational studies have increasingly become interested in identity and the effects of members' self-definitions on organisational behaviours, and of organisational practices on member identities (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Brown, 2001; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). A growing body of research is also examining the role of managers and particularly the classical 'middle manager': their organisational role of translating executive strategy into practical and operational action (Currie & Proctor, 2005) and the challenges of managing the tensions between staff and organisational interests (Carter et al., 2014; Clarke, Brown, & Hope Hailey,

2009; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Holden & Roberts, 2004; McConville & Holden, 1999; Sims, 2003; Watson, 1997). This research makes a contribution to knowledge by explicitly bringing the two fields together and using each to frame and interpret the other. The position of the classical middle manager 'in-between' is further theorised to develop the concept of the 'medial manager' defined as any manager who is responsible for directly managing others and who is directly managed themselves (that is, the middle manager becomes a sub-set of medial managers); and the organisational position 'in-between' potentially competing interests is used as a case study for examining identity processes. Conversely, identity is used as a lens through which to frame and interpret the experience of the medial manager 'in-between' competing interests.

## 1.3 Research aim and objectives

The aim of the thesis is to uncover the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association. Specifically the aim is to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' the staff and services they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible.

In order to clarify and focus the scope of the research a number of objectives have been developed:

1. To review the broad and complex terrain of identity studies and to establish the particular theoretical position adopted by the research;
2. To fully theorise and conceptualise the position of the manager 'in-between';
3. To uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles;
4. To understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims;
5. To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.

## 1.4 The research context

The research is conducted in 'Panorama Housing', a UK registered provider of social housing, also known as a Housing Association. The decision to conduct the research within such a context was informed by a number of factors. On the one hand housing associations operate within a particularly complex and dynamic environment characterised by competing expectations and discourses. Housing Associations are non-publically funded, not-for-profit businesses: as such they are subject to both business and social imperatives, and need to balance and sustain both commercial and public responsibilities. A housing association context therefore suggests a number of significant pressures and discourses within which managers must operate and make sense of their roles. On the other hand, Panorama Housing has consistently been ranked highly in national employee engagement assessments, suggesting that managers there are not working in an environment of overt conflict between staff and organisational interests. This enables the research to investigate the everyday interactions and sensemaking of medial managers, and the experience of the medial manager 'in-between' as a common rather than exceptional position.

## 1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 sets out the necessary theoretical and contextual framework for an investigation into manager identity. It establishes the research understanding of identity by developing an integrative conceptual model based on successive framing through concepts of identity work, narrative and mythical thought. Identity is understood as a dynamic, continuous and reciprocal process between self-identity as the self understood over time at any point, and identity regulation of discursive practices, through processes of identity work which are primarily accomplished through narrative and storytelling. The chapter goes on to outline such identity processes in the context of the organisation.

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of the 'medial manager' as a particular case study of organisational identity. The chapter firstly sets out and justifies a definition of the medial manager as any organisational member who both directly manages others and is directly managed themselves, and provides an overview of the organisational context in which medial managers operate. The chapter then builds on and integrates this with the research understanding of identity presented in chapter 2 to develop an

interpretative framework to conceptualise medial manager identity, based on dimensions of identification and agency, and which highlights the multiple ways in which managers may make sense of a highly contingent and contextual organisational position.

Chapter 4 sets out the underpinning philosophical framework for the research and provides an overview and justification of the research strategy and methods adopted. A reflexive abductive approach in which the researcher's theoretical pre-conceptions are engaged in continual iteration with the empirical data is justified as being consistent both with a social constructivist paradigm and with the research objective of understanding the ways in which individuals make personal sense of themselves and their organisational roles. The chapter then presents the research strategy as a single-unit embedded case study in which the units of analysis are both the 'bounded system' of the case organisation and the individual medial managers within it. The ways in which interviews, observations and organisational documents provide complementary methods through which to gather empirical data are discussed.

Chapter 5 presents a detailed description of how data was collected through interviews, observations and documents, including the design and administration of research instruments and how ethical considerations were identified and addressed. The primary source of data is explained as the elicitation of stories by managers about themselves in their organisational role. The chapter provides full details of how analysis of the data was carried out, including preparation of the data, the overall analytical strategy and specific methods used, in order to demonstrate research reliability and viability, and to enable the reader to understand and evaluate the conclusions drawn by the researcher.

Chapter 6 presents the analysis of the organisational discursive context and establishes the subjectivities impinging on medial managers within the context of the case organisation, Panorama Housing, and the possible discursive resources available to medial managers. It then goes on to present a detailed structural analysis of the manager stories elicited during interviews, through a narrative and then a paradigmatic analysis. The chapter demonstrates both the wide range of nuanced personal manager self-presentations, and the complex range of narrative identity work undertaken by medial managers. The stories that managers tell about

themselves are shown to both inform and set up a personal social world based on oppositions and also establish a personal position within that social world.

Chapter 7 presents a further level of analysis by contextualising the manager stories and texts in terms of organisational positioning. First, it identifies the possible subject positions referenced and recognised in the manager texts. Second, it identifies the range of tactics adopted by managers in response to multiple and sometimes contested subject positions. Third, it demonstrates the extensive range of ways in which managers interpreted their role and organisational position within their interview talk, particularly in response to the identified multiple and contested subject positions, and how manager stories and tactics for managing multiple subject positions inform and reflect such different positionings.

Chapter 8 reviews the findings presented in chapters 6 and 7 and interprets and contextualises them within the theoretical foundations of the thesis and the extant literature. This forms the basis for the final stage of analysis in which the data and findings are re-analysed to identify key affording and constraining factors of medial manager identity. An original and integrative model is developed which maps out key processes, affordances and constraints of medial manager identity work within the organisational context, and the chapter goes on to demonstrate how the model can further interpret the different medial manager positions described by managers and presented in chapter 7. The chapter discusses the implications of the findings and the contributions it makes to knowledge of identity and managers.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the key findings of the research in the light of the research objectives, and contributions made to knowledge. It reflects on the limitations of the research and proposes directions for future study.

## 1.6 Contribution to knowledge

The research uses the experience of the manager 'in-between' as a case study for examining identity processes, and conversely uses identity as a particular lens to frame and interpret that manager experience. The major contribution of the research is to develop an empirically grounded model of manager identity work based on the conceptualisation of the medial manager who is 'in-between' the staff and services

they manage, and the organisation to whom they are responsible. In doing so the thesis makes a number of original contributions to knowledge.

1 The thesis develops an original and integrative model of medial manager identity work:
    - 1.1 The central role of narrative in identity work is highlighted and clarified.
    - 1.2 Three distinct and inter-dependent phases of identity work are identified.
    - 1.3 Key factors which mediate the identity work of medial managers are identified, relating to perceptions of the organisation, perceptions of staff and practice, and perceptions of the self.
2 The thesis develops understanding of management:
    - 2.1 The concept of the medial manager is shown to be robust and reflective of manager experience.
    - 2.2 Tensions between different interests commonly attributed to the middle manager role are shown to also be part of the daily experience of managers at other levels, and perhaps especially at team leader level.
    - 2.3 The precarious nature of manager identity is highlighted, and the potential attraction of other organisational subject positions is revealed.
3 The thesis makes a methodological contribution:
    - 3.1 The developed method of eliciting stories and applying narrative and paradigmatic analysis is shown to offer rich insights into both the self-identities and identity work of medial managers.

## 1.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the nature of the thesis and established the value of the research for understanding both processes of identity and the organisational role of managers. It has summarised the content of the thesis and its contribution to knowledge.

The next chapter establishes and clarifies the position of the research within the complex and wide-ranging field of identity studies.

# Chapter 2 – Identity, narrative identity and identity work

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the necessary theoretical and contextual framework for a subsequent investigation into manager identity. It begins by introducing the field of identity studies and acknowledges the vast, multiple, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory nature of the field. The chapter therefore does not seek to provide any comprehensive overview, but instead sets out the particular theoretical position adopted by the research, and contextualises this position within relevant key debates within the field. Identity is understood to be an internal-external dialectic between the self and the social through which individuals make sense of their place in the world, and is further understood to be multiple, relational, discursive and ongoing. This understanding is further refined by successive framing through the concepts of identity work, narrative identity and mythical thought. An integrative conceptual model of narrative identity is developed which expresses identity as a dynamic, continuous and reciprocal process between self-identity as the self reflexively understood over time at any point, and identity regulation of discursive practices, through processes of identity work which are primarily accomplished through narrative and storytelling.

The chapter then goes on to outline these identity processes in the context of the organisation. It begins by considering the question of individual agency in the context of organisational power relations, effects and discourses, and concludes that although organisational discourse and structure may be powerful, there nevertheless remains space for individuals to construct their own meanings and to resist certain discourses. The chapter then reviews the multiple organisational effects on identity, including organisational structures, organisational discourse, different organisational actors including superiors and subordinates, and wider social constructs such as profession or occupation. Finally it considers the particular gaps in identity knowledge which this current research is positioned to address. This provides the necessary context for introducing the concept of the ‘medial manager’ in the following chapter.

## 2.2 Identity

At its simplest, identity may be understood as the means by which individuals and collectives understand and organise their place in the world: Who am I/we, and how should I/we act? Human needs include both the need for similarity and social validation, and the need for uniqueness and individuation (Brewer, 1991, 2003; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006b), and identity denotes ways in which one is the same and is different to others (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Karreman & Alvesson, 2001). Identity provides a knowledge structure which helps to organise and give meaning to past, current and future behaviours and experiences (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Musson & Duberley, 2007; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004) and enables individuals to adopt recognisable roles, beliefs and practices which are appropriate to different social contexts (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994; Ryan & Deci, 2003; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007).

Organisational studies have become increasingly interested in identity, recognising the effects of members' self-definition on organisational behaviours and of organisational practices on member identities (Brown, 2001). Indeed, it is suggested that identity can be utilised to inform and increase understanding of almost every aspect of organisations (Alvesson, et al., 2008; Haslam & Reicher, 2006). In part this has been driven by a wider recognition that identity has become a more prominent and significant issue for the modern and emerging postmodern world, in which the decline of social forces previously constraining identity such as religion and birth-right, the widening of possible role models and the rise of self-commodification or 'self-as-brand' are seen as making identity more contingent, fragile and fragmented (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008; Brown, 2001; Collinson, 2003, 2006; Gergen, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Mischenko, 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2003; Sinclair, 2010). Similarly, roles in post-bureaucratic organisations are seen as becoming less scripted and more improvised with the decline of fixed roles and hierarchies (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), and with post-bureaucratic organisations increasingly seeking to make claims on organisational member identity as an alternative means of control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; C. Casey, 1995; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Du Gay, 1996a; Musson & Duberley, 2007; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Identity is a vast field of study which has been extensively researched within the disciplines of psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and the humanities (Brown, 2015) as well as organisation studies, and it has generated a wide range of theoretical models and approaches including understanding identity in terms of social categorisations, the psyche, discipline and social interaction (Kenny, Whittle, & Willmott, 2011). Whilst the range of streams are founded on distinct ontological and epistemological assumptions, they are not "hermetically sealed" (Brown, 2015, p. 23): many are regarded and treated as complementary or related by scholars working within diverse traditions (Kenny, et al., 2011; Kira & Balkin, 2014) and the repertoire of intellectual resources may be regarded as creatively expanding (Brown, 2015). The following section will therefore not offer any comprehensive overview of the field of identity theory, (*c.f.* Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) but explain the particular position undertaken by the research, and the particular streams within the field which inform that position, recognising that to adopt any position is to selectively frame the subject of identity, to promote certain perspectives and understandings, and to preclude others (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Kenny, et al., 2011; Sanger, 1996).

### 2.1.1 Identity, self and society

Identity is understood as an internal-external dialectic (Jenkins, 2008) between the individual (the self) and others (society). Mead's (1934) work, despite its age, remains an important reference for conceptualising and describing this process (Jenkins, 2008) and provides a number of core concepts which are further built on and developed by this thesis. Mead argues that self-consciousness can only be attained by taking the attitudes of others toward the self in a social environment. In other words one cannot be both actor and spectator at the same time: identity can only be known through others (Shaw, 2010). Moreover, the individual must also be able to take on the generalised attitudes of others towards common social activities in order to enable shared, community action and a "universe of discourse" (Mead, 1934, p.156). However, the self is not a passive recipient, but also responds back to others and affects the responses and attitudes of those others. Mead expresses this process by describing the self as comprising two distinguishable phases, the 'I' and the 'Me'. The 'I' is the response of the individual to the attitudes of others, and the 'me' is the organised set of attitudes of others which the individual assumes. The

attitudes of others constitute the organised ‘me’ and the individual then reacts towards that as an ‘I’. The phases of ‘I’ and ‘me’ exist in a continual dynamic: “The ‘I’ of the present moment is the ‘me’ of the next moment” (Mead, 1934, p. 174). Through the ‘me’ the self is able to be recognised and maintain itself within the community; but through the ‘I’ the self responds to the community and to the ‘me’, and may seek to act on either.

A number of key implications for understanding identity emerge from this. First, identity is not monolithic but multiple (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The self is the product of social processes and so the organised ‘me’ and the responsive ‘I’ will be different in different situations (Mead, 1934). The self is commonly seen as multiple parts or identities, each representing the self as it is situated in a particular social context (Brown, 2006; El-Sawad, Arnold, & Cohen, 2004; Karreman & Alvesson, 2001; Strachan, Flora, Brawley, & Spink, 2011) which are organised into personal and social schema and which may have more or less importance or salience in different contexts (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Similarly, individuals will have individual responses towards the meaning, content and importance of common social roles such as manager or teacher (Ryan & Deci, 2003; Watson, 2008). Identity may be understood as the multiple typifications of self which may be subject to conflict and struggle: “selves account for identities, not identities for selves” (Weigert & Gecas, 2003, p. 268).

Second, identity is relational and interdependent: one’s identity must be accepted by another as credible (Goffman, 1959, 1961; Schlenker, 2003) and as compatible with the other’s own identity (McDonald, Rogers, & Macdonald, 2008); for example, an individual’s enactment of a subordinate role will be affected by whether another enacts a supervisor role as the individual expects (Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007). Linked to this, identity is dramaturgical. “People learn their identities by projecting them onto an environment and observing the consequences” (Weick, 1995, p. 23). They may also seek verification of identities by trying them out (Down & Reveley, 2009; Simpson & Carroll, 2008) or actively trying to present a convincing performance (Bolton, 2005; Goffman, 1959, 1961).

Third, identity is discursively constructed. Mead argues, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, that it is only through universally shared symbols, of

which the primary one is language, that the process of taking the attitude of another is possible (Mead, 1934). From a social constructivist perspective language and discourse are the means by which social reality, and thus identity, is constructed: we make shared sense of events through naming and labelling them (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gergen, 2000; Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Discourse (which is further discussed in section 2.7.1) may be described as a "system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992, p. 5), or the ways in which language is organised into different "regimes of truth" (Kornberger & Brown, 2006, p. 500), through which named effects, experiences and practices are reproduced (Kornberger & Brown, 2006; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley, & Littlejohns, 2006). Identity is constructed in the context of multiple, often simultaneous discourses which provide a frame of reference for individuals to position themselves and to be positioned (McKenna, 2010; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002) through categorical alternatives (Ybema et al., 2009), social roles and norms (Watson, 2009).

Finally identity is understood as an "unfinished project" (McInnes & Corlett, 2012, p. 27) of becoming. Mead's model of the self implies a continual dynamic between the self and the social, of taking the attitudes of others and responding back: it is an "ongoing iteration between social and self-definition...between internal strivings and external prescriptions" (Ybema, et al., 2009, p. 301). Individuals are continually responding to socially shared meanings, how they are represented by such meanings and how they might represent themselves (Hall, 1996; Stets & Burke, 2000) by forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity, as socially and discursively constructed, is necessarily always provisional and insecure (Knights & Clarke, 2014), a process which one does, not something one has (Jenkins, 2008); and any account of identity must take account of this ongoing process between the self and the social and pay proper attention to both (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Watson, 2008; Webb, 2006; Ybema, et al., 2009).

Having set out some of the key understandings of identity underpinning the research, the next three sections set out a particular conceptualisation, or framing, of identity in more detail, and how such framing positions the research with respect to key debates within the identity literature.

## 2.3 Framing identity (1): Identity work

The first way in which the research frames identity is through the metaphor (Brown, 2015) of identity work. Watson (2008, p. 129) defines identity work as involving:

> *...the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives.*

This definition distinguishes a number of key aspects of identity work which are reflected in other definitions (see for example Down & Reveley, 2009; McInnes & Corlett, 2012; Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). It focuses attention on identity as an ongoing dynamic between the self and the social, and as a process rather than a state; it characterises the dynamic as one of tension, or "struggle" between the individual's sense of self and social expectations of them at any given moment and context; and it expresses that process as being "mutually constitutive", with the self being both constrained by social effects and having (differing degrees of) agency to shape and influence how it is expressed within those social contexts.

The value of the concept of identity work is further clarified by Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity. This describes three phases of the ongoing interaction between the self and social context, 'self-identity', 'identity regulation' and 'identity work', which are all interrelated and interdependent. Self-identity is the self as reflexively understood at any point in time (Giddens, 1991) from the individual's unique assemblage of generalised attitudes of others (Jenkins, 2008; Marks & Thompson, 2010; Mead, 1934). Markus and Wurf (1987) call this the 'self-concept', made up of multiple self-conceptions which include well-elaborated and established self-conceptions and those which may be more tentative or provisional. They further propose the 'working self-concept' as the subset of self-conceptions which are accessible at any given point, which may include both well-established and provisional versions. Identity regulation describes the effects of social practices on identity: the ways in which discourses, practices, rules, norms, ideologies and social groupings position the individual in relation to others (Davies

& Harre, 1990; Hopkinson, 2003); and identity work is the process of continually "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" self-identity in the context of ongoing challenges or confirmations posed by identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262).

This expression of identity work therefore implies a position in regard to a key debate within the literature: the extent to which individuals have agency in being able to choose, construct and maintain identities and the extent to which identities are subject to the effects of discursive and institutional practices. Identity work recognises and attends to the subjectivities of the self in discursive and institutional contexts, the potential disciplinary power (Foucault, 1979, 1988) of discursive regimes (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Collinson, 2003; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Ford, 2006; Gabriel, 1999; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) and the multiplicity of identities in multiple social contexts (Collinson, 2003, 2006; Gergen, 1992, 2000; Sinclair, 2010). Nevertheless, identity work resists the post-structuralist extrapolation of this which argues that the self is wholly subject to social effects and merely assemblages of others (Gergen, 2000) or engaged in a "congenitally failing battle" (Kornberger & Brown, 2006, p. 500) to maintain identities, by recognising, through the role of self-identity, the individual's capacity for degrees of agency.

Such a position has both theoretical and empirical support. Although they exist in a social and discursive context, individuals are also uniquely embodied in a particular physical space and a particular viewpoint (Jenkins, 2008; Shaw, 2010). Individuals come to know the world experientially; we make sense of the world through lived and felt bodily experiences and through the sensing of our surroundings (Hallam, Hockey, & Howarth, 1999), and our selves and identities are embodied through our ongoing interactions (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012) and enactments (Down & Reveley, 2009; Goffman, 1959) with others. This includes emotional experiences and responses (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Davies & Harre, 1990; Mischel & Morf, 2003; Strachan, et al., 2011). Individuals are not merely passive recipients of identity regulation but respond to and may invest emotionally in identities (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Kreiner, et al., 2006b; Warhurst, 2011) and such emotional investment may then shape future interactions (Cascon-Pereira & Hallier, 2012). There is also empirical evidence to suggest both that individuals are able to resist discursive regimes and practices to varying degrees

(Brown & Lewis, 2011; Collinson, 1994, 2006; Leonard, 2003; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005) and are able to maintain a degree of continuity of self-identity. Individuals appear to hold enduring self-views and then act to acquire support for those self-views through the situations and relationships they choose, the identities, roles and responsibilities they communicate and emphasise, and the information and responses to others that they attend to and remember (Burke, 2006; Kira & Balkin, 2014; Seyle & Swann Jr., 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Swann Jr., Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003) even when the self-view is negative and challenged by positive feedback (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Seyle & Swann Jr., 2007; Swann Jr., et al., 2003).

Identity work therefore both acknowledges the importance of individual agency and subjectivity in a social context, and avoids unduly privileging either by focusing on the processes between the two – "identities-in-action" (Brown, 2015, p. 33) – rather than closed positions as sources for or targets of identity (Belova, 2010; Brown, 2015). In the next section, the concept of identity work as the processes of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262) self-identity in the context of identity regulation is further developed through a conceptualisation of narrative identity.

## 2.4 Framing identity (2): Narrative identity

Narrative may be understood as a particular way of using language to organise and to make sense of multiple and scattered events. Narrative is more than simply stringing episodes together (Bruner, 1991; Ricoeur, 1981): it is the process of "constructing meaningful totalities" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 279) by selecting and constituting events in particular ways as functions of a recognisable narrative genre or plot (Bruner, 1991). Narrative is therefore understood as an active process of conceptual framing (Hawkins & Saleem, 2012) and a particular way of creating a social reality (Cunliffe, Luhman, & Boje, 2004; Hopkinson, 2003) by selectively distilling disparate and often contradictory events and experiences into a coherent whole (Boje, 1991, 2001).

Before proceeding further it is necessary to clarify the use of certain terms and the extent and ways in which they represent distinct concepts: those of narrative, story and discourse. In particular there remains considerable disagreement and confusion over the difference, if any, between narrative and story (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi,

2009; Hawkins & Saleem, 2012). Many researchers use narrative and story interchangeably (Hopkinson, 2003; C. Phoenix, Smith, & Sparkes, 2010), whilst others seek to distinguish them as separate concepts, but in different ways. For example, Boje (2001) argues that stories are accounts of events but which are subsequently given coherence through plot by narrative, while Gabriel (2004, p. 2) suggests that stories are a particular type of narrative and that "what makes stories different from other narratives is plot". While some scholars argue that stories (or narratives) are distinguished by a minimal plot in which events take place which are causally connected and effect change (Bruner, 1991; Czarniawska, 2004a; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1987) others argue that stories should be understood as reflections on past experiences which may not incorporate a complete plot (Boje, 1995; Goosseff, 2010; Hawkins & Saleem, 2012).

The position adopted by this research is that it is not meaningful to distinguish between narrative and story (not least because the terms are used interchangeably in common English). Generally the research will refer to narrative in the context of discussing academic research where the term is more commonly used, and story to refer to the acts of narration that (non-academic) people commonly think of themselves as doing. The research does define narrative/story as being characterised by a recognisable plot in which events take place over time which are causally connected and effect change, and which invite interpretation and meaning-making of those events (Bruner, 1991; Czarniawska, 2004a; Dailey & Browning, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1987). However, following Boje (1991, 1995, 2001) and Hawkins and Saleem (2012) the research also recognises that a narrative/story may be discrete or may contribute towards a wider narrative, characterised here as a meta-narrative, which may not ever be explicitly told, but which may be read as an assemblage of related narratives/stories (Beech & Sims, 2007). Finally, narratives are distinguished from discourses. Narratives may serve a similar disciplinary function as discourses which construct social realities and frame possible meanings and interpretations (Brown, et al., 2009; Currie & Brown, 2003) through "defining characters, sequencing plots and scripting actions" (Boje, 1995, p. 1000); but discourses do not necessarily have a recognisable plot in merely describing a social reality (Parker, 1992). Narratives may therefore be understood as having the potential to act as a particular form of discourse.

A narrative conceptualisation of identity proposes that identity *is* storytelling (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). Humans appear to be pre-disposed towards storytelling as a means of making sense of the world (Brown, 2001, 2006; Watson, 2009) to the extent that they have been described as a "storytelling animal" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 201) or as "*Homo narrans*" (Fisher, 1984, p. 6). Individuals use narrative forms to understand and make sense of their own selves (Czarniawska, 2004a) by constructing life-stories or self-narratives which provide an account of an individual's life in terms of coherence and purpose (Watson, 2009), connections with others (Riessman, 2008), the relationships between self-relevant events across a life (Gergen, 2001) and across past, present and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; McAdams, 1985, 2008; Ricoeur, 1992; Sims, 2005b; Watson, 1997).

A narrative conceptualisation of identity can be directly linked to the models of identity and identity work already presented. McAdams and colleagues (2006, p.3) argue that consciousness is "an inner narration of experience" and go on to conceptualise the 'I' and 'me' of identity (Mead, 1934) as storytelling, in which the 'I' is the self-as-storyteller and 'me' is the self-as-the-tale: the 'I' tells a story of the self which becomes part of the 'me'. Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity work (section 2.3) draws on Giddens' (1991, p. 53) definition of self-identity as "the self as reflexively understood by the person *in terms of his/her biography*" (my italics). Narrative selves are not essentialist: like any story they require the imposition of "counterfeit coherence" (Boje, 2001, p. 2) through the selection, rejection, arranging and sequencing of events: that is, the processes of identity work in making sense of the self in a particular social context; and individuals may tell multiple stories about themselves (Reedy, 2009) to reflect different selves in different contexts (Sims, 2005b). Narrative self-identity offers a particular way of understanding the "mutually constitutive" (Watson, 2009, p. 129) dynamic between self-identity and identity regulation. Narrative accounts of the self change and adapt and are re-written in the context of social practices, but also build up recurrent themes over time (Watson, 1997) which demonstrate how the current self has grown out of past selves (Alvesson, et al., 2008) and has retained consistency over time in ways that are recognisable to others as well as the self (Ricoeur, 1992). Studies into identity through self-narratives have identified a range of strategies through which individuals construct coherent life stories: for example by making connections

between past experience and current self (Pals, 2006), identifying foreshadowing of later events in earlier ones (Watson, 2009), placing a life story within the social history of a wider group such as the gay community (Cohler & Hammack, 2006) or by utilising narrative genres such as an upward trend in which the individual continues to improve their situation in every way (Gergen, 2001).

Building on this, a narrative conceptualisation of identity also offers a particular perspective on the processes of socialisation of the individual self, by framing it as being able to tell stories in an appropriate genre and which are recognisable to a particular audience (Czarniawska, 2004a; Murakami, Murray, Sims, & Chedzey, 2009; C. Phoenix, et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008; Sims, 2008). Such socialisation takes place at a number of levels. At the most basic level, individuals learn to be able to construct narratives, that is, to select and organise events, which follow a recognisable story form: for example, a 'beginning', a 'low-point', a 'climax', an 'ending' (Gergen, 2001). At another fundamental level, individuals learn to construct themselves as coherent and non-contradictory (Davies & Harre, 2001). At the social interaction level individuals learn how to collaborate with others to construct narratives. Plummer (1995) argues that stories are the joint actions of three different groups: Producers who tell the stories, Coaxers or Coaches who facilitate or elicit the production of the story – including the researcher – and Consumers who hear the stories. Social interactions are collaborative processes and individuals who narrate stories of themselves do so being mindful of the social context, their reasons for telling the story and particularly the feedback they receive from their audience, that is, whether the audience accepts and affirms their narrative, and indeed their right to tell that particular story (Boje, 1991; Pasupathi, 2006). This may include learning the locally prescribed forms of a particular community such as a self-help group: the "stages we all go through" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 329). Finally individuals must learn the cultural resources with which narratives may be constructed, such as relevant descriptions and accounts of working life (Murakami, et al., 2009), cultural stereotypes (Davies & Harre, 2001) and dominant genres such as the tragic narrative, the romantic comedy or the heroic saga (Gergen, 2001). Indeed, Gergen's own research suggests that people are able to start with an expected narrative genre and then fit their own life experiences into it (Gergen, 2001). A narrative understanding of identity does not assume a wholly agential storyteller: by

presenting and accounting for themselves through stories and self-narratives individuals are also being 'storied' through their efforts to present themselves in socially recognisable and acceptable ways (Sims, 2005b).

In framing the social and discursive context as a narrative one, a number of researchers also draw attention to the plurivocal nature of such contexts (Belova, 2010; Boje, 1995; Brown, 2006; Cunliffe, et al., 2004). Narrative is language, and a Bakhtinian approach to language adds to our understanding of narrative identity in several ways. First, a Bakhtinian approach sees language as dialogue and as a concrete, lived reality (Maybin, 2001) in contrast to a Saussurean abstract system of signs. Individuals are not seen as creating utterances or meanings in isolation: any utterance is a "two-sided act" (Vološinov, 1929/1973/1994, p. 56) and a link in an ongoing chain of communication (Wertsch, 2001) which is both a response to previous utterances and an anticipation of future responses; and the meaning of the utterance is dependent upon the reciprocal social interaction between speaker (including the writer or the thinker) and the audience (which in thought can include the self). Second, language and meaning is "rented" (Holquist, 1981): the meanings of words are not abstract but the dynamic accumulations of multiple, often contested social uses (Maybin, 2001) and speakers must take words from "other people's mouths...and make it their own" (Bakhtin, 1935/1981/1994, p. 77). This prior usage inevitably affects the ways in which the speaker is able to use it themselves, because each utterance carries an ideological history which frames particular ways of thinking and behaving (Billig, 2001). Thirdly, however, language is conceived as an ongoing struggle between ideological and centripetal forces which seek to impose a unified and centralising meaning, and the centrifugal "heteroglossia" of multiple social groups putting language to their own use and constructing their own meanings (Bakhtin, 1935/1981/1994). In the narrative act of language itself, social structures are accepted, reinforced, challenged and undermined: a narrative understanding of identity not only draws attention to the multiplicity of possible narratives but the voices uttering those narratives, and the ways in which individuals respond and relate to those multiple voices in constructing narratives (Belova, 2010) through the selective assimilation of the words of others (Bakhtin, 1935/1981/1994). The processes of self-identity, identity regulation and identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) take place within the language that we adopt, adapt and put to use.

A narrative conceptualisation of identity therefore offers a way to explore the processes of constructing social reality. Narratives may reveal both the selves and social worlds that individuals construct, maintain, repair and reject. They may reveal the interpretative repertoires which individuals draw on in their social constructions (Silverman, 2006; Wertsch, 2013) and the discourses which are explicitly or implicitly drawn on (Dick, 2004) and may give insight into how and why people select from different available discourses (Belova, 2010; Hollway, 2001). Rather than trying to assess the 'truth' of a social world, narratives are an opportunity investigate what realities are constructed by a narrative (Wooffitt, 2008), to enter and to explore that constructed reality (Silverman, 2006), to understand how and on what occasions narratives are constructed and what functions they fulfil (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). The next section sets out how such processes of identity work may be further analysed and interpreted through a mythical conceptualisation of narrative and narrative identity.

## 2.5 Framing identity (3): A mythical approach to narrative

This section further develops the concept of narrative self-identity by drawing on the Levi-Straussian concept of mythical thought. From his studies of South American tribes Levi-Strauss argues that myths are surface-level stories which are derived from "deep structures" (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983). These deep structures are based on oppositions – such as the fresh and the decayed, the moistened and the burned, and beyond that, different world orders such as the cosmic and the earthly – and myths describe mediating or intervening positions between these oppositions: either in their relation to other myths or in their content, such as cooking to mediate between the raw and the burnt (Levi-Strauss, 1983). The significance of mythic thought is that it is "a phenomenon of the imagination, resulting from the attempt at interpretation" (Levi-Strauss, 1983, p. 5): it is metaphoric and figurative, seeking to intuitively and temporarily integrate different realms "in spite of the fact that reflective thought struggles to separate them" (Levi-Strauss, 1983, p. 339). Metaphor is not an addition or decoration but the very essence of myth: it is the selection of properties of the world which can express such oppositional relations (Levi-Strauss, 1983). Metaphors are the complex blending of multiple domains, exploiting connections between spaces to achieve new meanings (Fauconnier &

Turner, 2008), but also creating the space for different possibilities of meaning (Glucksberg, 2008; Sperber & Wilson, 2008).

Narrative is the means by which such deep abstract oppositions are mediated, and the narrator's position in relation to these oppositions is established: paradigmatic meaning establishes spatial positioning while syntagmatic meaning establishes an order and direction through time (Gregg, 2006). In other words, the apparently simple and superficial stories that we tell about ourselves and others are both founded on, and establish a mediating path between a selected and limited number of oppositions, through which we construct both a social world and our position within it. As Whittle and Mueller (2011) observe, the plot and characters within a story only gain meaning when a particular landscape is built up. A mythical reading of narratives therefore allows us to investigate and interpret identity work by attending to both the effects of self-identity and identity regulation, and the ways in which each informs and constructs the other: who I am defines my landscape and my landscape defines who I am (Brown, Colville, & Pye, 2014; Weick, 1995). Narratives and stories reveal the ways in which individuals recognise, respond to, negotiate, replicate and construct social discursive practices – the construction of a social landscape which frames the narrative plot – and also the ways in which individuals position themselves in relation to such practices: the construction of a narrative self-identity in which the individual establishes coherence and meaning over time.

## 2.6 A narrative conceptualisation of identity

Drawing on the three presented concepts of identity work, narrative self-identity and mythical thought, a narrative conceptualisation of identity is proposed (figure 1). Its foundation is Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity as three phases of the ongoing interaction between the self and social context, self-identity, identity regulation and identity work, which are all interrelated and interdependent. However, although Alvesson and Willmott understand identity to be "continuity (across time and space)" (Giddens, 1991, p. 53) and which is sustained through biography and multiple narratives of self, their model does not fully reflect the temporal element of identity which a narrative and mythical conceptualisation expresses.

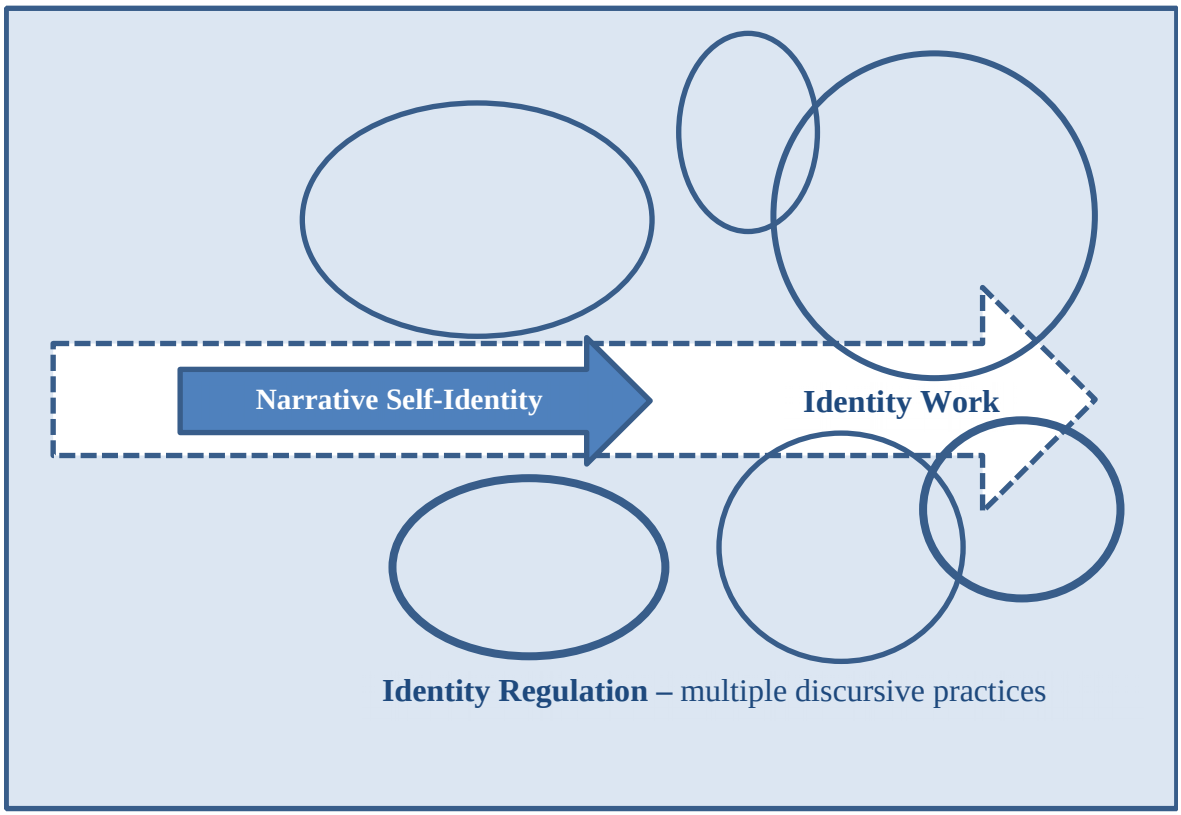


**Figure 1 – A narrative conceptualisation of identity (author's own model)**

In this model, self-identity – the individual's reflexive understanding at any moment – is described more specifically as narrative self-identity and is expressed as an arrow in order to reflect the ways in which narrative provides an account of the individual's life in terms of unity and purpose and which links the individual's past and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; McAdams, 1985; Ricoeur, 1992; Sims, 2005b; Watson, 2009). Although the individual may have a particular self-concept in any particular time and context, a function of narrative self-concept is to provide meaning of the present in terms of the past and propose prospective future actions (Sims, 2008). Identity work is similarly presented as a dotted arrow enveloping narrative self-identity, to express the ongoing work of constructing, revising, repairing and maintaining narrative self-identity in the context of identity regulation. Again, a narrative understanding of identity work acknowledges that identity work may involve past understandings of narrative self-identity as well as the present and the future, in order to maintain a coherent sense of self over time. Finally, identity regulation is presented as multiple circles which express the multiplicity of discursive practices impinging on narrative self-identity over time and space. Drawing on Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) mythical thought, identity work is

conceptualised as the ways in which an individual responds to (and is constrained by) multiple discursive practices of identity regulation by both selectively constructing a social landscape based on oppositions, and establishing a mediating path through that landscape, through continually "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" narrative self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262).

Having set out a conceptualisation of identity in some detail, the final sections of this chapter introduce the discursive context of the organisation and some of the particular ways in which organisations may regulate identity.

## 2.7 Identity in an organisational context

Organisations are particular arenas in which the interaction between the individual and their social context takes place (Alvesson, et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Organisations are vehicles of classification (Jenkins, 2008) which confer identities and meanings (Collinson, 2003) through labelling (Jenkins, 2008) and the production and reproduction of status and perceptual, cultural and ideological materials (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001). Organisations are discursively constructed (Phillips, et al., 2004) and may be usefully described as discursive spaces for individuals to occupy (Brown, 2006; Brown, Humphreys, & Gurney, 2005; Clarke, et al., 2009) and within which to individually and collectively mobilise language in the construction of meaning (Kornberger & Brown, 2006) by drawing on particular interpretative repertoires (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

### 2.7.1 Organisation, discourse and power

Organisations are also sites of power relations and effects. Power is not something which is owned or a given but is the multiplicity of effects which make certain forms possible and others impossible (Eveline, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Organisations are constructed through power effects in that they are assemblages of conventions, past practices and understandings which have become taken-for-granted facts (Phillips, et al., 2004) such that they constitute something distinct, recognisable and reproducing. They represent the achievement of legitimacy in which dominant discourse formations not only attain hegemonic status, but are seen as common sense or 'the truth' (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Motion & Leitch, 2009). Such dominant discourses frame the context in which other realities

such as identities can be constructed, by defining acceptable identities and excluding alternative positions (McKenna, 2010; Watson, 2008), by controlling the premises for decision making (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) and through disciplinary practices such as induction, training, socialisation and measurement (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Collinson, 2003; Kornberger & Brown, 2006). Such disciplinary mechanisms can also be taken up by members themselves: by regulating their conduct and reproducing dominant discourses they are able to provide public and private accounts of themselves as members (Brown & Lewis, 2011; C. Casey, 1995; Du Gay, 1996a; Ford, 2010; Foucault, 1988; Kornberger & Brown, 2006; Shaw, 2010; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009).

The research has already set out an ontological position that individuals have degrees of agency in the social context of identity regulation, and many authors point out the limitations of discourse and structure in ever achieving total control over members, even in extreme contexts such as prisons (Brown & Toyoki, 2013). Discourses do not exist in isolation: there may be many and conflicting dominant discourses (Alexiadou, 2001; Leonard, 2003; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) which give individuals possibilities for creative selection; and even where largely hegemonic discourses exist, individuals may have the space and freedom to construct their own meanings and subaltern discourses (Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite, & White, 2004; Kornberger & Brown, 2006) in making their own responses to the particular situations and contexts they find themselves in (Denissen, 2010; Halford & Leonard, 2006). Nevertheless it remains the case that some organisational actors have greater access to meaning systems and resources than others (Musson & Duberley, 2007). Those with control of institutions and resources can employ “strategies” to promote a discourse while those without can only engage in “tactics” at the temporal and spatial margins of that control (Corbett-Etchevers & Mounoud, 2011; De Certeau, 1984; Du Gay, 1996a). Furthermore, acts of opposition or resistance to discourses carry an inherent ambiguity in that they also confirm the existence, or reify, what is being contested (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Clegg, Kornberger, & Pitsis, 2011; Collinson, 2005; Du Gay, 1996a; Jaros, 2009; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005) and may actually create the necessary breathing space for individuals to conform to organisational norms (Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

There has been increasing interest and empirical research into the role of narratives and stories as a means through which organisational members make sense of and enact the organisation (Brown, et al., 2009; Hawkins & Saleem, 2012; Hitchin & Maksymiu, 2012; Rhodes & Brown, 2005). Stories are both a means of explaining the past, including the reasons for events, actions and outcomes (Boje, 1991; Shaw, 2010), allocation of praise and blame (Whittle, Mueller, & Mangan, 2009), and for determining future actions by providing a recognised plot to follow (Boje, 1991; Parry & Hansen, 2007; Sims, 2008). Organisational actors tell stories in order to make sense of their organisational roles and careers (Korica & Molloy, 2010; Mallett & Wapshott, 2012), their organisational work (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008), transitions to new roles (Down & Reveley, 2009; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014), as responses to organisational discourse (Corbett-Etchevers & Mounoud, 2011; Currie & Brown, 2003; McKenna, 2010) including authoring alternative stories (Gleeson & Knights, 2008; Humphreys & Brown, 2002) and to make sense of the organisation to others (Sims, 2003). Stories can also be used to act upon others (Davies & Harre, 1990; Garcia & Hardy, 2007): by incorporating others in their stories, organisational actors position others in different roles – such as villains – (Sims, 2005a; Whittle, et al., 2009) or ventriloquise other actors (Clifton, 2014) to support their own self-construction (Mueller & Whittle, 2013; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Stories may be polished performance pieces that are well recognised and mobilised by organisational elites (Whittle, et al., 2009) but they may equally be constructed through fragments of everyday conversations before or outside any agreed or imposed account (Boje, 1991, 2001; Whittle, et al., 2009). Analysis of organisational stories is proving a powerful means of revealing multiple, competing and contested discourses and the sense-making and identity work that organisational actors undertake (Brown, et al., 2014): not only in seeking to author their own stories but in response to those of others (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

## 2.8 Organisational identity regulation

Organisations provide a range of regulatory influences on individual identity including the structural environment and the expectations of organisational members. This section explores the nature of identity regulation within the organisation in greater detail, and the ways in which organisational structures and discourses position members (Davies & Harre, 1990).

### 2.8.1 Organisational structures

An organisation is embodied by the way it is structured, its internal rules and external context (Pye, 2005). These structures limit what can be done or imagined in that social context and provide pre-existing sensemaking tools that contribute towards which meaningful cues may be extracted and what meaning may be created (Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). This may be through the ways in which people and functions are organised, such as divisions of labour and hierarchies (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Doos, Johansson, & Wilhelmson, 2015), job design (Grant, Berg, & Cable, 2014; Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007), job titles (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), HRM practices (Delmestri, 2006), distribution of power (Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007) and the function of meetings (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001); through the ways in which members are assessed and rewarded (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Clegg, et al., 2011; Collinson, 2003); and through the ways in which members and outputs are measured, including internal methods such as targets, appraisals, business plans and electronic surveillance, and external methods such as audits, league tables and customer feedback (Clegg, et al., 2011; Collinson, 2003). These structures represent material realities which promote and reinforce (or undermine) identities and discourses (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Musson & Duberley, 2007) and which may provide both powers and capacities to organisational members, and duties and obligations which others may use to support their claims (McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerald, & Waring, 2015; McInnes & Corlett, 2012).

A key unit of any social structure, including organisational structure, is that of role (Reitzes & Mutran, 1994). Roles provide meaning for and expectations of the individual's participation in a particular social network (Stryker & Burke, 2000) by suggesting a "bundle of obligatory activity" (Goffman, 1961, p. 86), but roles are also embedded in the continuous dynamic between the self and the social. As relational constructs the meaning of one role is embedded in that of another such as those of supervisor and subordinate (Luhrmann & Eberl, 2007; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007): all social roles remain somewhat provisional and the successful performance of a role is dependent on it being credible to another (Goffman, 1959, 1961; Schlenker, 2003) in a particular context. Similarly, the degree to which roles are incorporated into the individual's self-concept will vary. Goffman emphasises the performative aspect of roles and how individuals may successfully perform a role

without attachment to it (Goffman, 1961). Roles may become internalised as identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000) or they may be a means for individuals to improvise and play with the multiplicity of roles and role expectations they inhabit in the construction of relational meaning (Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

### 2.8.2 Organisational identity claims

A modern organisational paradigm has been that organisations need a strong, unifying culture in order to be successful (Clegg, et al., 2011; Du Gay, 1996b; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Haslam, 2004). Peters and Waterman's (1982) best-seller has been especially influential, arguing that successful companies have created a climate of dedication to the central values of the company, and that they do this by aligning the individual's search for personal meaning with the goals and objectives of the company (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Organisations and much organisational theory have become increasingly concerned not only with creating an explicit and accessible organisational culture, but especially with organisational identification: how to encourage organisational members to incorporate their organisational membership into their own identity (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Riantoputra, 2009) and how organisations try to shape the identities of members to match organisational identity (C. Casey, 1995; Du Gay, 1996a, 1996b). In fact, although modern post-bureaucratic organisations emphasise freeing up or 'unleashing' organisational members, organisational attempts to influence member identity can simply be seen as a post-bureaucratic form of organisational control, by engineering self-policing employees (C. Casey, 1995; Clarke, et al., 2009; Collinson, 2003; Gabriel, 1999; McKenna, Garcia-Lorenzo, & Bridgman, 2010; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

There are a number of ways in which organisations seek to control members through identity claims. Drawing on the extreme example of Amway Distributers, Pratt (2000) suggests that there are two complementary strategies that organisations can adopt: sensebreaking and sensegiving. Sensebreaking means creating a new need for meaning among members (Pratt, 2000). This may be through emphasising how the organisation, or membership of it represents a fresh start (Du Gay, 1996a), presenting organisational membership as an elite status which must be earned (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009) or by equating organisational progress with becoming a better person (C. Casey, 1995; Du Gay, 1996a). Sensegiving means

trying to influence members' sensemaking towards the organisation's definition of reality or "positive programming" (Pratt, 2000), for example by symbolic representation of the organisation as something positive and distinctive, or discursive reference to 'we' and to what it means to be a prototypical member of the organisation (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Costas & Fleming, 2009), or through recruiting and promoting people who demonstrate strong commitment to organisational values and practices (Carter, et al., 2014). In particular, sensegiving is achieved through discourse. Discourse does not merely exist as verbal constructs but "involves 'making up' new ways for people to be" (Du Gay, 1996b, p. 158): a discourse of 'know your customer', for example, also suggests specific ways to operationalize this and specific ways for employees to behave (Du Gay, 1996a; Ford, 2006) which may then become normalised as how employees should behave (Musson & Duberley, 2007). Narratives may form particularly powerful ways for organisational leaders to establish and reify social and hierarchical relations and ways of working (Brown, et al., 2005).

Casey (1995) is pessimistic as to the ability of members to resist organisational attempts to create "designer employees", arguing that employees live under "disciplinary siege...in a defended privacy and a defended out-of-work life" (C. Casey, 1995, p. 82). Certainly there are strong motivations for employees to collude with organisational discourse: to fit in to a significant social context (Clarke, et al., 2009; Humphreys & Brown, 2002); because certain discourses may be attractive (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a; Ford, 2010; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006); because the organisation itself is attractive (Whetten, 2007); or because organisations are especially demanding (Ashforth, et al., 2008). Nevertheless, organisational claims on member identity may not be successful. Organisational discourses may be confused or multiple and may not be equally meaningful for different organisational roles or levels (Down & Reveley, 2009; Leonard, 2003); they may be undermined by alternative discourses or realities (Humphreys & Brown, 2002; McGurk, 2009); and attempts by organisations to create a single organisational identity may simply create identity problems for members who are required to adopt additional and potentially conflicting role identities such as doctor-managers (McGivern, et al., 2015; Pratt & Corley, 2007).

### 2.8.3 Organisational members

As a member of an organisation, individuals are also subject to multiple expectations from other organisational members, and subject to multiple positionings by others (Davies & Harre, 1990).

#### Line managers and senior managers

Line managers and senior managers are often the primary conveyers of official organisational discourse as discussed above. However, the position of senior managers as hierarchical superiors with more formal power (Raes, Heijltjes, Glunk, & Roe, 2011) may also influence individual identity directly. Senior managers may influence the scope and nature of subordinate activity and their workplace self-concept though the nature and degrees of support and resources they make available and the extent to which they involve subordinates in decision-making (Henderson, Burmeister, Schoonbeck, Ossenberg, & Gneilding, 2014; Mantere, 2008). They may try construct subordinate roles or identities in ways which support their own identity, for example as being resistant to innovation and change (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Raes, Glunk, Heijltjes, & Roe, 2007; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) or as a reflection of their own identity and values (Creary, Caza, & Roberts, 2015; Doos, et al., 2015). They may challenge subordinate identity by trying to impose their own authority, for example by micromanaging, publicly undermining, overruling decisions or challenging independent subordinate activities (Gleeson & Shain, 2003; Sims, 2003; Warhurst, 2011). Finally, senior manager priorities may consciously or unconsciously frame the individual's decision making (Hallier, 2004; A. G. Sheard & Kakabadse, 2007; Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010): they are the immediate representatives of the organisation to their subordinates and act as referents for subordinate sensemaking (Lee & Taylor, 2014; Pye, 2005).

#### Subordinates

Subordinates may influence an individual's identity, particularly lower down the organisation where managers and subordinates tend to work more closely (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Huy, 2002). Research has found that subordinates want their managers to value them and to be concerned for their needs and feelings (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Laschinger, Purdy, Cho, & Almost, 2006); to shield them from the excesses of senior manager policies and

practices (R. Jones & Kriflik, 2006) and from injustice (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007); to be available to provide personal support and guidance in problem-solving (Huusko, 2006); and to be trustworthy (Seijts & Roberts, 2011). Individual identity may also be threatened by subordinates, for example when new technologies remove the need for direct supervision (Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010) or when subordinates bypass their line managers (Warhurst, 2011).

**Peers and Teams**

When individuals work closely with and share a common role or interest with other organisational members they are likely to form social identities based on these sub-organisational groupings (Austin, Regan, Gothard, & Carnochan, 2013; Croft, Currie, & Lockett, 2015; Ellemers & Rink, 2005; Haslam, 2004; Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006). These may be based on organisational groupings such as teams or divisions, or on more cross-cutting commonalities such as shared role or profession, discussed further below. Such social identities are supported by in-group favouring and out-group denigrating (Turner, 1975) which may affect how individuals see themselves in relation to other groups and to the organisation and lead to the defence of perceived group interests (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Fiol, Pratt, & O'Connor, 2009). Group or team membership also has an effect of controlling or moderating individual behaviour in order to conform to the group prototype and retain the approval of team members (Hogg, 2001, 2003) and this may also be utilised by organisations to create self-monitoring teams, for example where individual performance is available to the whole team (Clegg, et al., 2011; Knights & McCabe, 2003).

**External stakeholders**

External stakeholders refers to individuals and groups who are not directly members but who have an interest in an organisation and who may directly or indirectly influence the organisation and its members. These may include customers, competitors, partners, local and central government, regulatory frameworks and public opinion (Collinson, 2003; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Motion & Leitch, 2009). As well as exercising different degrees of influence the expectations of multiple stakeholders may be conflicting and impossible to reconcile (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Gabel, 2002) creating further potential dilemmas and choices for individual identity construction.

### 2.8.4 Social constructs

There are a number of other constructs which may influence identity in an organisational context. Profession or occupation may be a source of status, power and self-esteem through expert knowledge and associated value systems (Abbott, 1988; Ashcraft, 2013; Bolton, 2005; R. Casey, 2008; Korica & Molloy, 2010; McGivern, et al., 2015; Pratt, Rockman, & Kaufman, 2006; Waring & Currie, 2009) which may need to be protected and contested (Ashcraft, 2013; Currie & Brown, 2003; Korica & Molloy, 2010; Waring & Currie, 2009) and may dictate appropriate behaviour (Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008). Conversely, organisational members may also struggle with the lack of a recognised or traditional profession, for example in new, knowledge-intensive roles in which competence is difficult to substantiate (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012), or when individuals have moved from technical to managerial roles (McConville & Holden, 1999; Warhurst, 2011), particularly where they retain an emotional attachment to their previous role (Austin, et al., 2013; Croft, et al., 2015). More generally, work may be an important expression of personal values, integrity and social contribution (Foster, 2012). Organisational space and environment such as different physical spaces, territory, freedom of movement and boundary control can provide resources for constructing different identities (Ainsworth, Grant, & Iedema, 2009; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Halford & Leonard, 2006; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). Finally, social constructs such as gender (Denissen, 2010; Eveline, 2005; Ford, 2006, 2010; Watson, 2008), race (Slay & Smith, 2011), religion (Essers & Benschop, 2009) and sexuality (Rumens, 2011) may set particular limits on the individual's ability to author themselves outside of wider social discourses and expectations (Roberts, 2005; Ybema, et al., 2009).

## 2.9 Investigating identity and identity work

Having introduced the field of identity studies and set out the particular theoretical position of the research, and having reviewed the literature addressing identity within an organisational context, this final section discusses some of the remaining knowledge gaps which this research is positioned to address.

This chapter has set out how identity is understood to be multiple, relational, discursively constructed and ongoing. However, much research into identity has

tended to investigate one specific regulatory source such as new technologies and systems (Korica & Molloy, 2010; Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010), management learning (Sturdy, et al., 2006; Warhurst, 2011) or surveillance (Brown & Lewis, 2011); or specific identity work processes such as impression management and performance (Bolton, 2005; Down & Reveley, 2009; Iszatt-White, 2009; Leonard, 2003), disidentification (Costas & Fleming, 2009; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001) or fantasy (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006) in a particular context. Although such an approach enables a more detailed and granular understanding of each process, a number of authors have called for more studies which address the ways in which multiple processes of identity regulation and identity work occur and interrelate. Ashforth and colleagues (2008, p. 341) express this vividly when they argue that "these variables capture relatively static predicators and not process; that is, they provide pictures of the surface of an ocean wave, not the undercurrents that formed it". Particular effects are described and explained as different waves, but not the ocean itself. To extend this metaphor, this research therefore seeks to offer not only "pictures of the surface", or what manager identities look like, but to uncover the "undercurrents" of the processes that form them: "how, why, and with what implications identity work is engaged in by people in organisations" (Brown, 2015, p. 31). In particular, the research uses narrative methods to explore the processes of identity work undertaken through narrative self-identity and the stories individuals tell about themselves and others (section 2.6).

More fundamentally, identities are intersectionally constructed (Essers & Benschop, 2009) through the occupation of simultaneous social categories and simultaneous social identity regulations: identities are not simply accumulations of categories but dynamically co-constructed by and between different sources of identity regulation. Identity is more than any sum of its parts. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) make a related point when they argue for the value of single, in-depth case studies which enable the study of an individual's attempts to navigate between multiple discourses and a richer understanding of such processes through the detailed context of one individual; and this is echoed in Brown's (2015) call for more research into the effects of the organisational context on identity work, and whether and how similar discursive resources are used in similar ways by organisational members. More specifically, Brown and Toyoki (2013, p. 890) argue that much research into identity

work either fails to explain how "a series of loosely specified processes" relate in particular contexts, or how "highly specific tactics" might be more widely generalised. That is, knowledge of particular waves is produced, or of undercurrents, but not how undercurrents form particular waves which are also part of them (Ashforth, et al., 2008). In this context there is still little research into how individual organisational members accommodate, select and resist multiple identity regulations and discourses: by commonly addressing specific processes of identity work or identity regulation there has been far less attention paid to the dynamic co-construction of an individual identity. In order to address this research gap, the research seeks to investigate the multiple processes of identity work undertaken within a particular organisational context which is fully discussed in the following chapter: the 'medial manager'. The medial manager is presented as both a particular case and exemplar of the multiple demands and discursive practices which individuals must negotiate in constructing, maintaining, repairing and re-forming identities in a workplace context; as a particular conceptualisation of the position of the manager in the workplace; and as an insightful way of framing manager workplace identities.

## 2.10 Summary

This chapter has introduced the field of identity studies and set out the position of the research. A narrative conceptualisation of identity has been developed in which identity is understood as an internal-external dialectic, in which individual self-identity is affected by social attitudes through identity regulation, but also has agency to respond by "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262) self-identity through identity work. Narrative is understood as the primary means by which such identity work is accomplished, by providing an account of the self over time – a narrative self-identity – and by telling stories which construct both a social landscape based on oppositions, and trace a distinctive path within that landscape through narrative plot. These processes of identity regulation and identity work have been explored in greater detail in the context of the organisational environment, and particularly the context of organisational power effects and discourses. Individuals are subject to multiple identity claims and discourses within organisations, some of which may attain hegemonic status and which frame the context in which other realities, including

identities, can be constructed. Such sources of identity regulation include organisational structure and discourses, the expectations of other organisational members and wider social constructs. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of identity claims and discourses in itself affords individuals some space and freedom in which to construct, select, organise and resist discourses and identities.

Having set out the theoretical background to the field of identity studies, the position adopted by the research within the field and the organisational context in which identities are constructed and negotiated, the next chapter introduces the concept of the ‘medial manager’ within the organisation.

# Chapter 3 – The ‘medial manager’ and manager identity

## 3.1 Introduction

Following the elaboration of the research position on identity and identity processes in an organisational context, this chapter introduces the concept of the ‘medial manager’ as a particular case study of organisational identity and identity work. The chapter firstly sets out and justifies a definition of the medial manager as any organisational member who both directly manages others and is directly managed themselves, and goes on to provide an overview of the organisational context in which medial managers operate, including the effects of flattening organisations and devolved responsibilities. The chapter further analyses the position of medial managers ‘in-between’, with responsibilities both to the strategic aims of the organisation and senior managers above them, and the interests and expectations of staff and operational practice below them.

The chapter then builds on this analysis and integrates it with the approaches to identity presented in chapter 2 to develop an interpretative framework which conceptualises medial manager identity, based on dimensions of identification and agency. Identification for the medial manager ‘in-between’ primarily relates to potentially competing identifications as members and representatives of the organisation, concerned with the interests of the business, and as members of their staff teams or service areas, concerned with the interests of team members and/or recipients of their service. Agency for the medial manager reflects the competing expectations and demands of those potential identifications with the organisation, the staff they manage and operational or professional practice, and the ways in which medial managers resist, accept, negotiate or re-work those expectations; and in particular, the ways in which the medial manager position in the organisation implicates them both as controllers and the controlled. Based on this conceptualisation the chapter argues that the answer to the question “Who am I, as a manager”, is neither simple nor straightforward, and that managers are subject to multiple subject positions and claims on them, and may respond to such multiple claims in multiple ways. Finally the chapter identifies how the interpretative

framework may be used to address particular gaps in research into identity and specifically manager workplace identity.

## 3.2 Identity and the 'medial manager'

Management in an organisation is increasingly being conceptualised as an identity project (Andersson, 2010; Brown, 2006; Carroll & Levy, 2008; Clarke, et al., 2009; Harding, Lee, & Ford, 2014; Sturdy, et al., 2006; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Warhurst, 2011; Watson, 1997, 2001). Despite over a century of prescription and research, management is still not a clearly defined occupation, underpinned either by an established body of knowledge and operating principles, or a clearly specified set of tasks (Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 2001). For example, a meta-analysis of competencies for senior managers (Vilkinas, Cartan, & Piron, 1994) identifies 55 separate competencies with little overlap between different researchers. Watson argues that management is actually a social and moral practice, requiring managers to both interpret and be responsive to the wants of others, and to be able to shape meanings, values and human commitments (Watson, 2000, 2001), that is "the ongoing achievements of human interaction" (Watson, 2001, p. 223). In other words, the business of managing is the business of identity, or the interaction of the self with the social world; and this is borne out by a number of studies in which managers reflect on their experience and practice. Managers talk about their own practice in terms of developing their social selves, such as learning to motivate people, deal with hidden agendas and reconcile conflicts of interests; and they often draw on prior learning from other life experience and personal background (Warhurst, 2011; Watson, 2001). They experience tensions between their own expectations and desires as managers and those of their organisational colleagues (Andersson, 2010) including expectations of senior managers and staff (Harding, et al., 2014) and threats to their position as managers from senior manager and staff actions (Warhurst, 2011). Their role and status as managers is contextual and fragile, requiring constant maintenance and reforming as organisational contexts and discourses change (R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

Organisations have traditionally been predicated on hierarchy, and literature on managers is usually careful to define which layer of managers is the subject of

attention (see for example a meta-analysis of over a thousand articles on leadership by DeChurch and colleagues (2010) in which 76% specified the organisational level of managers studied). That organisational level will affect the nature of the manager role, for example in terms of time horizons, boundary span and degree of direct interaction (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001) is not disputed. Nevertheless, it may be argued that specifying managerial levels is becoming problematic. The last four decades have seen organisations increasingly becoming flatter by thinning out layers of management (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Hassard, McCann, & Morris, 2009; Holden & Roberts, 2004; Huy, 2002; McConville & Holden, 1999) resulting in the expansion of traditional management functions to the supervisory role (Hales, 2005; Holden & Roberts, 2004; Huusko, 2006), the blurring of distinctions between managers and supervisors (Down & Reveley, 2009; Hales, 2005; Musson & Duberley, 2007) and new structures such as networks, partnerships or modular forms co-existing with, or even replacing traditional hierarchies (Ainsworth, et al., 2009; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Pedersen & Hartley, 2008) – although it is questionable to what extent traditional top-down hierarchies have actually been replaced, rather than simply dressed in a discourse of devolvement (Hales, 2002; Hassard, et al., 2009). Accordingly, some authors draw attention to the importance of not treating all managers at a particular level, in their different organisational contexts, as a homogenous group (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002).

With this in mind, the research deploys a new and particular conceptualisation of management: the 'medial manager'. A medial manager is defined as any member of an organisation who both directly manages others and is directly managed themselves. This conceptualisation therefore captures supervisors or first-line managers at the lowest level, and senior managers who report to an executive management team or board at the highest level, but might exclude, for example, certain project managers. The term, which derives from the Latin *medius* or middle, conceptualises the position of the manager 'in-between' whilst enabling attention to be focused on *the nature of the pressures and subjectivities that the manager is positioned in-between*, rather than the organisational position itself. In particular it avoids confusion with the commonly recognised organisational position and function

of the ‘middle manager’: effectively those who are commonly classified as middle managers form a sub-set of medial managers.

A description of management by Currie and Proctor (2005) precisely characterises the essential position of the medial manager: “...the purpose of this role is *translating* the intentions of others – executive management – into action” (Currie & Proctor, 2005, p. 1350, my italics). Currie and Proctor (2005) propose this as a definition of middle managers; but it is notable that the concept and function of ‘translating’ is also used to describe first-line management roles (*e.g.* Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Hales, 2005). This definition captures the semi-autonomous nature of medial managers. Although they are constrained by both executive intentions and the context in which they work, they do not necessarily simply push instructions downwards, but must interpret, convert and apply executive strategy, which is likely to be at the macro level (Seijts & Roberts, 2011) into something which can be realised operationally by others below them. The medial manager may be understood as being ‘in-between’ the demands and expectations of the organisation and its aims above them, and those of staff and operations that they manage below them. And while hierarchical position may lead to degrees of difference in the nature and scope of this act of translating, the position adopted by the research is that it remains a fundamental feature of any manager ‘in-between’, and that differences in hierarchical level are not more significant that commonalities of the position of both managing and being managed. The definition of a medial manager accords with Watson’s definition of management as social practice, in being able to interpret and respond to the wants of others and to shape meanings, values and human commitments (Watson, 2000, 2001); and it further clarifies the nature of management as the business of identity, and of both acting on and being acted upon by others (Harding, et al., 2014). The following sections explore in more detail the particular social and discursive practices to which medial managers are subject in the organisational context: as subjects of organisational change, and then, primarily, as subjects of competing organisational interests.

## 3.3 The medial manager – subject of organisational change

Medial managers have been particular foci and subjects of organisational change. Although the thinning out of management layers has been driven by a number of

factors such as increasing global competition (Holden & Roberts, 2004) it has also been somewhat predicated on seeing classical middle managers in particular (who are a sub-set of medial managers) as organisational obstacles, either as additional layers who simply pass down instructions to others (Currie & Proctor, 2005), as resistors of change (Huy, 2002) or as simply being unnecessary (Hassard, et al., 2009). Such changes have been as prevalent in the UK public sector as the private (Hassard, et al., 2009). The impact on remaining medial managers across all organisational levels has been significant in several ways. They have commonly seen an increase in workload and responsibilities, for example taking on human resource management (HRM) functions (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Holden & Roberts, 2004; Huusko, 2006; Laschinger, et al., 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999) and with their responsibilities becoming increasingly diverse and fragmented (Hassard, et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This increase in responsibilities, coupled with advances in technology and systems management, has also led to the increasing subordination of technical roles to a more general managerial role, with medial managers being less responsible for technical expertise and close control of work and more responsible for managing workflow and supporting people (Carter, et al., 2014; Huusko, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999; Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010). Alongside this, the public sector has seen a trend of developing senior professionals into managerial roles (Bolton, 2005; Gleeson & Shain, 2003; Holden & Roberts, 2004), further blurring the distinctions between technical and managerial roles.

These changes also have implications for the workplace identities of medial managers. McConville and Holden (1999) argue that reduced management layers and increased HRM responsibilities have made managers more visible to both their superiors and subordinates and potentially more vulnerable to conflicts of interest. A manager in a US engineering firm reported by Hassard and colleagues expresses it in industry terms: “Organisational layers are basically insulation in an organisation and that insulation muffles the messages very often...we must try to remove as much of that insulation as possible. But that exposes the wires, right? Onto the elements, right?” (Hassard, et al., 2009, p. 113). McConville and Holden (1999) also suggest that technical expertise often provides a source of personal power and status as the expert in the field, whereas managerial work is riskier and more reliant on

persuasion. Professionals who have taken on managerial duties may struggle to integrate potentially competing demands and discourses (Austin, et al., 2013; Gleeson & Knights, 2008; Iedema, et al., 2004; Pratt & Corley, 2007; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005). Finally, the more fluid nature of new organisational structures and new technologies may require identity work for medial managers. Managers may be less able to rely on classical hierarchies and need to re-negotiate and recreate their basis for authority (Ainsworth, et al., 2009; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Pedersen & Hartley, 2008); and they may be vulnerable to their superiors and subordinates dealing directly with each other (A. G. Sheard & Kakabadse, 2007; Warhurst, 2011) or to systems that undermine their authority over a team's performance such as Total Quality Management (Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010) or lean management (Carter, et al., 2014).

## 3.4 The medial manager – at the centre of organisational tensions

This section further examines the nature of the 'in-betweenness' of medial managers. Ainsworth and colleagues (2009) note that much of the literature on middle managers (who are defined here as a sub-set of medial managers) construe being 'in the middle' as negative or problematic, for example being 'stuck' between more powerful or intractable forces, or as a 'muddle' or place of ambiguity. Whilst it is right to challenge assumptions of manager powerlessness, the concept of medial managers being 'in-between' is an important starting point. Medial managers are not typically autonomous but subject to a range of influences and demands from above, around and below, from inside and from outside the organisation (Gabel, 2002) and their success depends on maintaining relationships with all their stakeholders. Yet there is commonly a 'dissensus' of stakeholder expectations and interests leading to potential role conflict and ambiguity for the manager (Currie & Proctor, 2005); and managers themselves appear to recognise this situation. In a study of a part-time MBA cohort Warhurst (2011) finds that when invited to describe the nature of their managerial work, the majority of respondents from a range of managerial levels focused on managing vertical and horizontal relationships within the organisation and with external stakeholders, and drew on incidents of reconciling conflicts of interest to characterise their management practice. Similarly other studies find managers recognising the need for political work in their daily interactions with organisational members and to adopt different behaviours in order to reconcile

different interests (G. Sheard, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2011) and moving between contradictory subject positions in which they accept and resist managerialist discourses (Harding, et al., 2014).

There is a growing body of literature focusing on the (classical) middle manager position within the organisational hierarchy, between superiors above them and staff below them, and it is argued that its findings in relation to *their position in-between* are applicable to all medial managers. (Indeed, many of the smaller body of studies of first-level managers also draw attention to their position 'in-between' staff and superiors (*e.g.* Carter, et al., 2014; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Hales, 2005; Lloyd & Payne, 2014).) Partly in response to modern criticisms of middle managers, some authors describe these managers as key strategic actors within organisations who are essential for keeping the top and bottom of the organisation aligned and ensuring that organisational strategy is actually carried out (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Stewart, Barsoux, Kieser, Ganter, & Walgenbach, 1994). Different levels in organisational hierarchy mean different perceptions and perspectives (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Corley, 2004; Seijts & Roberts, 2011; Shamir, Zakay, Breinin, & Popper, 1998) and medial managers may be seen as having a crucial role in facilitating communication between senior management and employees (Corley, 2004; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006), translating macro-strategy into micro-operation (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Huy, 2002), mediating conflicting discourses (Alexiadou, 2001) and managing the effects of change, including the emotional impact, on staff (Huy, 2002). As Sims (2003) puts it, medial managers are required to tell stories of senior strategy that junior staff can believe in and stories of operational practice that senior managers can trust.

Nevertheless, although managers themselves may also view their bridging and facilitative roles positively (Corley, 2004; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006), their position between more senior managers and staff remains potentially problematic. A fundamental paradox of modern organisations is that employees are both human beings whose attachment and co-operation must be sought, and also resources which are subordinate to business needs and therefore expendable (Watson, 2008) and it is arguable whether such tensions can ever be fully resolved, but are at best deferred or disguised. In practice their position 'in-between' presents a number of challenges for the workplace identities of medial managers. They may find that they are

required to embody contradictory discourses and roles: those of the pragmatic manager and leader able to take tough decisions for the sake of the bigger picture, and of the caring, supportive supervisor and colleague (Clarke, et al., 2009; Watson, 1997). They may be required not only to enact organisational decisions which may be unpopular, but be expected to secure staff agreement and commitment (Holden & Roberts, 2004; Lee & Taylor, 2014; Lloyd & Payne, 2014) and publically support decisions they do not agree with (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003; Sims, 2003), whilst maintaining the personal loyalty and goodwill of staff (McConville & Holden, 1999) and personal credibility with staff, including professional values (Austin, et al., 2013; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015). Arguably discourses of enterprise, combined with increasingly tight organisational controls, have exacerbated the medial manager position, reinscribing their role as being responsible for winning the hearts and minds of staff, and personalising responsibility for outcomes (Du Gay, 1996a) while reducing manager autonomy to take personal decisions or use discretion (Carter, et al., 2014; Hales, 2005; Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003).

A linked problem is the degree of control and power available to medial managers. Medial managers may not be part of decision-making processes or may have little power to influence them, but still be expected to carry out such decisions and be held responsible for their successful delivery (Ainsworth, et al., 2009; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; McConville, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999); and their lack of involvement may also mean that they have insufficient resources to properly implement decisions (McConville & Holden, 1999). Issues of power and control also directly affect the manager's relationships with their staff. The Pelz Effect (Pelz, 1952) finds that staff are more likely to listen to and trust their manager if they perceive the manager to have power, meaning that organisations which do not involve more junior managers in decision making, or who remove decision-making functions from them risk undermining their relationship with their staff (Soltani & Wilkinson, 2010). Managers seeking to maintain the trust and respect of their staff therefore have some incentive either to publically support and defend an organisational decision, rather than risk appearing to have been bypassed, or, where a decision is unpopular, to construct an oppositional position alongside their staff.

The position of medial managers between their staff and senior managers also makes them potentially vulnerable within the organisation. In the context of flatter organisations it is difficult for medial managers to avoid animosity from either senior managers or staff (McConville & Holden, 1999). In effect medial managers are the face of their staff to more senior management and of more senior management to their staff and therefore embody the potential source of frustration to each (Gleeson & Shain, 2003). McConville (2006) argues that a mediating role can diminish the manager position because it reveals their lack of autonomy and power base: they risk being seen merely as interpreters between two parties without a language or policy of their own. McConville goes further in suggesting that medial managers fulfil the function of deferring organisational tensions, by acting as a buffer or shock absorber (McConville, 2006). This is similar to the role of the "toxic handler" (Frost & Robinson, 1999) who provides emotional support to other staff to enable them to cope with organisational dysfunction. Frost and Robinson draw attention to the emotional cost to the toxic handlers themselves; and the medial manager who potentially bears the brunt of both senior manager and staff demands and frustrations also risks cost to themselves without strategies to manage themselves and others.

All this is not to construct medial managers as passive or malleable subjects of organisational tensions, helplessly blown in the direction of the strongest prevailing wind, but to set out the nature of the particular organisational context in which they operate and the particular challenges which medial managers must manage as part of their daily and ordinary work. The final sections of this chapter start to theorise the position of the medial manager in terms of identity, and to develop an interpretive framework through which to explore the varying responses and tactics adopted by medial managers in their organisational roles.

## 3.5 Theorising the dimensions of medial manager positioning

The medial manager is conceptualised as being hierarchically and functionally positioned 'in-between' the organisation and the employees and teams that they manage, and may be required to negotiate or 'buffer' tensions between competing interests and expectations. This position is now further explored and developed within the context of the researcher's understanding of identity as set out in chapter 2. At its simplest identity is understood as the means by which individuals and

collectives understand and organise their place in the world: Who am I/we, and how should I/we act? (section 2.2). Such an understanding is further framed by Alvesson and Wllmott's (2002) model of identity as the dynamic interaction between self-identity and identity regulation, or the tension and struggle between the individual's sense of self and social expectations of them at any given moment and context, through identity work (section 2.3). This section further explores the nature of such identity work within the particular organisational context and position of the medial manager: the nature of discursive social practices and claims as to who and what a medial manager should 'be', and the scope afforded to the medial manager by their organisational position to act in different ways. First, the position of the medial manager 'in-between' is examined in terms of identification and the possible, and potentially competing, identifications with both the organisation and with the staff and services that they manage. Second, the nature and extent of agency is further examined in the particular context of the hierarchically-determined organisational position of the medial manager.

### 3.5.1 Identification

Identification with social groups is an important aspect of identity and meeting the human need for similarity and social validation as well as uniqueness and difference (Brewer, 2003; Kreiner, et al., 2006b). The following section draws on the insights developed by social identity theory without accepting the claims of social identity theory proponents that it provides a fully comprehensive explanation of identity: social and group identification is recognised as being important to constructing self-identity in the context of social practices (Brown & Toyoki, 2013), but it is not understood to be the "main show" (Alvesson, et al., 2008, p. 6). Social identity theory focuses on the sources of identity and less on the complex processes by which individuals adopt and resist such identifications (Belova, 2010; Brown, 2001) and which is the particular concern of this research. Nevertheless, social identity theory is useful in describing the particular context in which medial managers work and for highlighting some of the tensions inherent in their organisational position as expressed in terms of identification.

Individuals, including medial managers, may have multiple social identities within organisations, including identification with the organisation itself, functional divisions, work teams, professions and unions (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Ashforth,

Rogers, & Corley, 2011; Haslam, 2004; Meyer, et al., 2006). Reviewing research into the effects of multiple identities, Ellemers and Rink (2005) find that individuals tend to identify more strongly with sub-units such as work teams rather than larger divisions or the organisation itself because these groups are more immediate and exclusive and offer a more salient and distinctive identity, although they also note the possible effects of context and individual self-expression. Ashforth and colleagues (2011) note that even where there is a strong collective organisational identity there are also multiple factors that may act against isomorphism such as the desire for distinctiveness, competing institutional logics or personal views about the organisation and its role and purpose. Rousseau (1998) suggests that social identity can be a weaker "situated", or superficial identity, dependent on cues such as entering the workplace, or a stronger, more enduring "deep structure" identity in which the individual incorporates values and characteristics of the group. Individuals may form deep structure identifications because, amongst other reasons, they perceive the group as being compatible with and as sharing their interests and values (Haslam, 2004; Meyer, et al., 2006; Riketta & Nienaber, 2007; Rousseau, 1998).

These two factors of group identity, proximity and perceived shared interest, are particularly relevant to the social identities that impinge on medial managers. Marks and Thompson (2010) argue that studies of employment relations and indeed human behaviour itself cannot be done without a conception of interests, and that perceptions of collective or shared interests may be a key element in identification with particular groups. Much research on employee perceptions has focused on the extent to which employees perceive their interests to be different to those of management, or the expression of 'us and them' (Coupland, Blyton, & Bacon, 2005); and several studies suggest that such perceptions not only exist, but persist despite deliberate attempts by management to undercut them and promote a shared or unitary perspective by promoting organisational ideology (Shamir, et al., 1998), re-designing workspace (Baldry & Hallier, 2007) or job design (Coupland, et al., 2005). Baldry and Hallier (2007) argue that such attempts to remove perceptions of 'us and them' are fatally undermined by those very existing perceptions. As a hierarchically superior group, managers are perceived to have different interests to employees, and

so management actions may be perceived as being for the benefit of managers and not employees, even when they claim otherwise.

Social identity theory makes further sense of this dynamic between actual interests, proximity and perceived interests. Individuals establish and maintain the positive distinctiveness of the in-group through comparison with other groups and the denigration of those other groups (Hogg, 2001, 2003; Turner, 1975). Proximity makes it easier to sustain such positive distinctiveness, while distance makes it easier to denigrate the out-group. In other words, despite attempts by organisations to create a shared organisational identity, it is easier (though by no means inevitable) for individuals to construct social identities based on smaller, proximal groups; and moreover, given that social identities are sustained by comparisons with out-groups, construction of those with perceived and actual different interests as out-groups is a viable strategy (although out-groups may also include other teams or divisions in different contexts). Indeed, social identity theory implies that 'us and them' is natural and inevitable. Group membership encourages members to believe the worst of the out-group (Kramer, Brewer, & Hanna, 1996) and to use any power available to act in the interests of the in-group and against the out-group (Sachdev & Bourhis, 2006). Group membership therefore tends to reinforce perceptions of differing interests between the in-group and the out-group.

In summary it is argued that there is an inherent tension of competing interests between the organisation and its employees, and that such tensions are likely to be reinforced by social identity processes. This leads to a particular tension for medial managers. Medial managers are subject to organisational claims and subject positions: through discourses of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b; Ford, 2006; Shaw, 2010; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006) and enterprise and personal responsibility (Du Gay, 1996b; Hassard, et al., 2009; McKenna, et al., 2010; Pedersen & Hartley, 2008) which seek to construct them as active and transformational change agents on behalf of the organisation; and through the expectation that they will operationalise and deliver organisational decisions and strategy. Medial managers therefore have a number of incentives to construct social identities as part of the organisation, for example because of the attractiveness of such discourses; because it supports their status within the organisation; or because it is preferable to appear part of a decision than impotent to change it. However,

medial managers also have incentives to construct social identities as part of the teams and services they manage. They may spend significantly more time with their teams than with their own superiors and therefore be more aware of the interests of their team members (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Huy, 2002; Lee & Taylor, 2014; Lloyd & Payne, 2014). Research into expectations of immediate line managers suggests that employees may consider the line manager to be separate to more senior managers and more willing to protect their interests (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; R. Jones & Kriflik, 2006; Laschinger, et al., 2006; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Medial managers need to maintain personal relationships with their teams in order to effectively deliver organisational objectives and to secure meaningful engagement (Holden & Roberts, 2004; McConville & Holden, 1999). Managers who have been promoted from technical or professional roles may also retain an awareness of and concern with professional values and operational or customer needs (Alexiadou, 2001; Bolton, 2005; Brown & Lewis, 2011; R. Casey, 2008; Warhurst, 2011) and to retain former relationships with staff (Austin, et al., 2013; Croft, et al., 2015). Finally, managers are themselves also employees whose own interests may conflict with the interests of the organisation: they are "simultaneously contributing to the control of the enterprise while also being subjected to it" (Hassard, et al., 2009: 46).

### 3.5.2 Agency

As set out in chapter 2, within the field of identity a key question is the extent to which individuals have agency in being able to choose, construct and maintain identities, and the extent to which identities are subject to the effects of discursive and institutional practices. Chapter 2 established the research position as recognising both the potential disciplinary power of discursive regimes and the individual's capacity for degrees of agency and to resist such discursive regimes to differing extents. In particular, the chapter drew on two key factors to support such a position. First, the framing of identity as narrative identity work recognises the role of (narrative) self-identity in providing the individual with identities which they are able to invest in emotionally and which may be sustained over time, as well as being adaptive to different contexts (sections 2.3 and 2.4). Second, the chapter examined the organisation as a particular example of a discursive regime (section 2.7), and concluded that such regimes are unable to ever achieve total control over their

members. Individuals may be able to find spaces and freedom to construct their own meanings and subaltern discourses even within a largely hegemonic regime such as a prison (Brown & Toyoki, 2013). More commonly, discourses do not exist in isolation and there may be many and conflicting dominant discourses which give individuals possibilities for creative selection, or even to use one dominant discourse to resist another.

The organisational position of the medial manager 'in-between' the organisation and the staff and services they manage provides a particular example of such conflicting discourses: that is, conflicting discourses and expectations are embedded in the medial manager position itself. Section 3.2 proposed that a definition of the medial manager role is "translating the intentions of others – executive management – into action" (Currie & Proctor, 2005, p. 1350). However, such a definition also exposes the contradictory subject positions that medial managers are expected to occupy, often simultaneously. Two words are especially problematic: first, what is expected of the medial manager through the act of "translating"; and second, how is the medial manager to understand and interpret the "intentions" of others?

To 'translate' has many meanings in English but which may summarised as two primary meanings. The first is to express, convert or interpret the meaning of something into another medium, and which therefore implies some degree of engagement and ownership of that translated meaning on the part of the translator. As representatives of the organisation medial managers may be expected to demonstrate such engagement and ownership (section 3.4). As targets of discourses of leadership (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003a, 2003b; Ford, 2006; Shaw, 2010; Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006) and enterprise and personal responsibility (Du Gay, 1996b; Hassard, et al., 2009; McKenna, et al., 2010; Pedersen & Hartley, 2008) they are increasingly expected to act in order to engage their staff with organisational aims and values, to be innovative, and to take personal responsibility for the success of their areas of operational responsibility. However, the second meaning of 'translate' is to move something from one position or place to another, and which implies that the object being moved is translated intact and otherwise unchanged. Medial managers are also expected to demonstrate loyalty, implementing senior or executive management decisions including those which they may not have been involved with (Ainsworth, et al., 2009; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; McConville,

2006; McConville & Holden, 1999) in ways that remain faithful and consistent with executive instructions. In other words their organisational position implies that they both act independently and act as they have been instructed: they are both controllers and controlled (Harding, et al., 2014; Hassard, et al., 2009).

The notion of the 'intentions of others' is equally problematic and reveals conflicting expectations of the medial manager. Managers need to be able to understand and be able to interpret executive intentions in order to comply with and to fulfil them. Implicit within discourses of leadership and enterprise is the expectation that medial managers may be able and willing to constructively contribute to the development and implementation of executive strategy (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Huy, 2002; Laschinger, et al., 2006). Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) (writing specifically about middle managers) suggest two distinct ways in which medial managers may contribute, both of which are predicated on the medial manager's operational knowledge and expertise: 'synthesising information' by interpreting and sharing information gained from operational practice in order to inform executive decision making; and 'championing alternatives' in which the medial manager proposes alternative strategies derived from operational experience and realities. Medial managers are therefore expected to understand, interpret and engage with executive intentions in order to be able to effectively contribute to their development. This may also align with other expectations on medial managers. As managers of staff they may be subject to staff expectations that they act to make senior managers aware of operational issues, to put forward suggestions on behalf of staff (Hallier, 2004), to represent and defend their interests against management decisions and to have personal concern for them (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Huy, 2002; R. Jones & Kriflik, 2006; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). Medial managers who have been promoted from professional or technical roles may also be subject to discourses of professional values and practices, and the needs of clients, customers and other affected stakeholders (Austin, et al., 2013; Bolton, 2005; Brown & Lewis, 2011; Warhurst, 2011). Nevertheless, seeking to contribute towards executive intentions may be a risky activity. Raising too many concerns about operational implementation, or proposing changes that are too divergent with existing executive strategy may mean the manager being perceived as insufficiently successful or committed, or even disloyal

(Hallier, 2004; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005) and much research finds managers practising what Gleeson and Shain (2003) call "strategic compliance" in which explicit or perceived resistance is minimised or kept covert (*e.g.* Alexiadou, 2001; Collinson, 2006; Jaros, 2009; Musson & Duberley, 2007). Medial managers are invited to engage with, interpret and contribute towards organisational intentions, but in prescribed ways: they are limited in the ways in which they may speak and act (Harding, et al., 2014).

### 3.5.3 Summary: dimensions of medial manager identity

This section has sought to conceptualise the particular nature of identity and identity work in the context of the medial manager and their organisational position 'in-between' those to whom they report and those whom they themselves manage. It has set out two dimensions framing medial manager identity which are directly implicated in the medial manager's position 'in-between'. First, the meaning and role of a medial manager is not straightforward or obvious, but subject to multiple demands and expectations from multiple constituents, including executive and senior managers, staff, peers, customers and external stakeholders including professions. Social identity theory in particular highlights the multiple possible identifications available to a medial manager as a direct result of their organisational position 'in-between' and the multiple ways in which to 'be' and to act as a medial manager. Second, such multiple and possible identifications, and the contradictions inherent in the medial manager position, to be both an independent agent and loyal subject, and to draw on their operational experience to contribute towards executive intentions but only in prescribed ways, afford the medial manager some scope for agency in managing, sustaining or selecting between multiple and conflicting discourses and subject positions. Management as an identity project (Andersson, 2010; Warhurst, 2011; Watson, 2001) may therefore be understood not simply as growing in maturity into an organisational role, but as making personal sense of a complex and contingent role which is subject to multiple and competing demands, expectations and discourses.

## 3.6 Investigating medial manager identity and identity work

Having presented a conceptualisation of management as the 'medial manager', the organisational member who both directly manages others and is directly managed

themselves, and an analysis of the medial manager position in terms of organisational tensions and multiple and competing identifications, this final section outlines some of the key gaps in knowledge of manager identity, which this research seeks to address.

Section 2.9 argued that a significant gap in identity research is the paucity of studies which investigate the ways in which individual identity is dynamically co-constructed from the discursive resources available. Research has tended instead to address specific processes of identity work or identity regulation, producing pictures of the ocean surface rather than the undercurrents, and focusing on the formation of individual waves rather than the ocean itself (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Brown, 2015; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This research seeks to address this gap in part by investigating identity and identity work in a particular organisational context: that of the medial manager who both directly manages others and is directly managed themselves. The discussion and analysis of the medial manager as an example of a specific organisational actor has revealed particular challenges for our understanding of identity; and the framing of the medial manager through an identity perspective has similarly revealed gaps in our knowledge of managers within an organisation.

First, the medial manager represents a particular example of dualities and potential conflicts between multiple identifications or subject positions. Nevertheless there has been relatively little attention paid to the dualities inherent in the medial manager function and the ways in which these impinge on medial manager workplace identities. Although the tensions between organisational and staff interests are relatively well documented there have been very few studies on how managers, or other organisational actors, actual manage those tensions and potentially competing identifications (Clarke, et al., 2009; Koerner, 2014). Clarke and colleagues themselves provide one such example, investigating how managers accommodated and switched between competing discourses and demands from senior managers and staff in a large-scale redundancy situation, while studies by Alexiadou (2001) and Gleeson and Shain (2003) examine the competing discourses of marketisation from senior managers and pedagogy from staff in the education sector, finding managers adopting varying but relatively consistent degrees of commitment to and compliance with the new marketing discourse of senior managers in their relations with staff.

However, the chapter has suggested that such tensions and competing identifications are actually inherent in the medial manager role itself, and part of the daily work and experience of medial managers, rather than being the result of particular or extreme situations. In the related area of leadership there is acknowledgement that organisational members may be both leaders and followers within the organisational hierarchy and in different contexts (Collinson, 2006; Hassard, et al., 2009; Hollander, 1974; Horsfall, 2001; Kelley, 1988; Shamir, et al., 1998; Watson, 1997), yet research into the processes of leader and follower identity, including research generating theoretical models, typically focuses on the leader-follower relationship as a discrete unit, unrelated to a wider organisational context (Croft, et al., 2015). Medial managers are responsible towards multiple constituencies simultaneously (Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Sims, 2003), and there is much more to learn about how they negotiate and manage such multiple responsibilities in their daily work. In particular, in seeking to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between', the research aims to investigate both the ways in which managers personally understand their organisational roles in such a context (research objective 3) and the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work (research objective 5).

Second, the position of the medial manager draws attention to the potential conflicts between organisational identifications or subject positions, but a number of authors argue that how managers and other organisational actors manage such conflicts remains an important but under-researched area (Croft, et al., 2015; Horton, Bayerl, & Jacobs, 2014; Koerner, 2014). A small number of studies have investigated ambiguous and 'in-between' organisational positions which Ellis and Ybema characterise as "institutional liminality" (2010, p. 281) and identify ways in which organisational members defer identity closure by flexing between different discourses (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Iedema, et al., 2004) or by bracketing contradictory statements and discourses (Clarke, et al., 2009; El-Sawad, et al., 2004). However, other studies suggest that managers may seek to resolve competing identifications by constructing an identity from different discursive resources which have personal meaning, such as constructing a manager identity using the language of nursing (Croft, et al., 2015) or management in the service of nursing staff and

their work (Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015). More research is therefore needed into the ways and extent to which individuals are able to sustain the demands of multiple positions or paradoxes (Smith & Lewis, 2011), the effects of different contexts on the individual medial manager (Brown, 2015), and the effects of the individual's own self-identity in constructing an organisational position which is personally meaningful. This links to research objective 4 which aims to understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims.

Section 1.3 set out the aim of this thesis as seeking to uncover the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association, and specifically to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to which they are responsible. The section also set out five research objectives. The first, to review the broad and complex terrain of identity studies and to establish the particular theoretical position adopted by the research has been addressed in chapter 2. The second, to fully theorise and conceptualise the position of the manager 'in-between' has been addressed in this chapter. In addressing these two objectives the two chapters have also clarified the particular knowledge gaps in the fields of identity and manager studies which the research aims to contribute to, and how this will be achieved through the final three research objectives. In particular, this chapter has established the central purpose of the conceptualisation of medial manager identity for the thesis. By conceptualising medial manager identity and the particular dimensions framing identity and identity work, which are directly implicated in the medial manager's position 'in-between', it proposes a way of characterising "pictures of the surface" (Ashforth, et al., 2008) of what medial manager identities might look like in terms of behaviours and attitudes in response to their organisational position. The subsequent data collection and analysis is therefore focused in two concurrent ways: investigating the extent to which the conceptualisation of the medial manager is a coherent and pragmatic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) (see section 4.3.3) reflection of medial manager experience; and using the conceptualisation and proposed dimensions framing medial manager identity as a means of framing and investigating the processes of identity work by which medial managers form, repair, maintain, strengthen or revise workplace

identities: “how, why, and with what implications” (Brown, 2015, p. 31) managers respond in different ways to competing and multiple organisational identifications and subject positions, and uncovering the undercurrents of processes which form the surface pictures (Ashforth, et al., 2008).

## 3.7 Summary

This chapter has introduced the ‘medial manager’ as a particular way of conceptualising the position of a majority of managers across the organisational hierarchy: as one who directly manages others and is directly managed themselves. The chapter has set out and analysed the organisational context in which contemporary medial managers operate, including increasing devolved responsibilities within flatter organisations, and has highlighted some of the tensions inherent in the position ‘in-between’ organisational and staff demands and expectations. This position and the accompanying tensions form the basis for a conceptualisation of medial manager identity based on dimensions of identification and agency. This conceptualisation is proposed as a heuristic and interpretative tool with which to frame the subsequent investigation into the identities and identity work of medial managers. In particular, it offers a way of framing the research as it seeks to address under-developed areas in the field of identity studies: the different ways in which individuals navigate and respond to multiple subject positions; and the ways in which individuals, and specifically managers, navigate and respond to competing subject positions within an organisational context.

# Chapter 4 – Methodology (1): philosophy, strategy and design

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters set out the theoretical and conceptual basis for an investigation into manager identity, by establishing a narrative conceptualisation of identity, a conceptualisation of the 'medial manager' and a conceptualisation of medial manager identity which integrates the organisational position of the medial manager with the research understanding of identity. The following two chapters consider the methodology through which an investigation into the identity and identity work of medial managers is achieved. This chapter firstly sets out the underpinning philosophical framework for the research and the implications for generalisability and forms of validity. It then provides an overview and justification of the research strategy and methods adopted, as a case study design with empirical data collected primarily through face-to-face interviews and supported through observations and documentary analysis. The particular choice of case study organisation is also introduced and justified. Finally the chapter discusses the limitations of the chosen methodology. The chapter therefore establishes why the research was conducted in particular ways. The subsequent chapter provides a detailed description of the design and implementation of the research instruments, procedure for data analysis and consideration of ethical issues.

## 4.2 Philosophical framework

This research explores identity and the ways in which we understand, make sense of and distinguish ourselves and others. In other words, issues of ontology and epistemology are at the heart of the research topic itself: what is the nature of concepts such as mind and self, social interaction and society; what can we know about such concepts, given that we become both the subject and object of research; and how can we best try to investigate and understand them? Moreover, working within a recognisable research paradigm is essential for establishing a certain number of shared assumptions and to provide a conceptual framework in which to structure decisions and interpretations (Becker, 2000; Cooper, 2008). Yet because they make the world simple enough to handle (Gleick, 1987), research paradigms are

also inevitably flawed and vulnerable to attack (Becker, 2000). As researchers we can therefore only acknowledge that we have a perspective which is unlikely to be the only possible one (Cooper, 2008) and rather than trying to appear value-free, "to give the reader a good look at the researcher" (Stake, 1995, p. 95).

This research proceeds from a nominalist ontological perspective, in which reality is not presumed to have an objective pre-existence, but is socially constructed though the names, labels and meanings that we attach to certain objects, acts and experiences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2008). Epistemologically the research proceeds from a social constructivist position (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2008). Research is seen as a means of understanding the ways in which people make sense of their worlds, rather than seeking to explain an objective world: it's aim "is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it" (Stake, 1995, p. 43). A social constructivist approach also acknowledges the researcher as an integral part of the research process. Knowledge is socially produced through the interactions between the researcher and the researched (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and the researcher is seen as a constructor of social reality through their interpretation of the data (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Rather than attempting to exclude the effects of the researcher, therefore, a social constructivist epistemology requires a reflexive attitude on the part of the researcher (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Bold, 2012; van Manen, 1997). Such a position is therefore consistent with understanding identity as being the processes of taking the attitudes of others towards the self in a social environment (Mead, 1934), and as being multiple, relational, discursively constructed and provisional (section 2.1.1).

Sanger (1996) poses a crucial ontological question: What does observable data mean? From a social constructivist perspective what we can observe are the interactions between social beings, or the *processes* of actively creating reality. It is essential to maintain the distinction between the processes through which reality is constructed and the reality of the phenomenon which the researcher is investigating. Methods of collecting research data, such as interviews or observations are in themselves merely another form of social interaction involving the researcher. Van Manen (1997) draws the distinction between experiential accounts of everyday life and the experience of everyday life itself. Forms of data may tell us how people

make sense of their worlds at a particular time and in a particular context, which is different to the experience 'in the moment' (Kelly, 2008; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002); individuals construct a reality in each telling (Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2006). Forms of data can therefore only be taken for what they are – a context-specific social construction through a particular social interaction – and not as standing for anything else (Czarniawska, 2004a; Riessman, 2008). Nevertheless, such a view should not be regarded as unduly pessimistic or limiting. As a researcher, engaging in social interaction with the research subject, the researcher is also engaging with and taking part in those processes of constructing reality (Blumer, 1969; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Van Manen (1997) suggests that conversation during an interview may be conceived as a triad. The two speakers (the researcher and the interviewee) are engaged in a conversational relationship with each other, and both are also involved in a conversational relationship with the phenomenon being investigated. The researcher and the interviewee thus share in a process of interpretation, sensemaking and social construction around the phenomenon. In the related pragmatist tradition, knowledge is provisional but can be accumulated and built on as 'what we know for now' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) based on the social interactions and purposive 'conversations' with those who have experience of the phenomenon.

## 4.3 Purpose and parameters: theory, generalisability and validity

Having established an ontological and epistemological position, the research must also set out its purpose: What is research for and what can research do? As Ridder and colleagues put it, the researcher must establish which conversations they are entering (Ridder, Hoon, & McCandless Baluch, 2014). These questions are explored by addressing three key issues: the nature and relationship between empirical data and theory; the extent to which it is possible to generalise findings from research; and how the knowledge claims of research can be verified and validated.

### 4.3.1 Research, data and theory

The relationship between empirical data and theory is commonly presented as a binary choice between positivist and quantitative deduction, where theory (or hypothesis) is tested with data, and interpretivist and qualitative induction, in which new theory is derived from data and which forms the basis of grounded theory

(Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This research deliberately rejects such a binary distinction and adopts a reflexive abductive approach in which theoretical pre-conceptions and empirical data are engaged in a continual process of iteration, and in which the integral role of the researcher is fully recognised (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012).

Such a position is justified for three reasons. First, it is consistent with the social constructivist position already established. Grounded theory makes a claim for a purely inductive approach in which theory is derived from data without prior assumptions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and although Corbin and Strauss have subsequently diverged from Glaser and acknowledged both the researcher's role in interpreting the data and the prior understanding that they inevitably bring to the research process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) they still emphasise the importance of minimising the use of pre-conceived theoretical frameworks, and the primacy of the data over what the researcher brings to the analysis. However, from a social constructivist perspective it is not possible to talk of data or facts which speak for themselves (Czarniawska, 2004a; Riessman, 2008). Forms of data which we can collect are the products of social interactions involving the researcher in which subjects make sense of their worlds in a particular time and context (Kelly, 2008; Silverman, 2006): they are jointly produced social constructions in which the researcher is fully implicated. Moreover, the researcher constructs a particular social reality when they write their research: from literature review to the recording and presenting of data to the final paper, report or dissertation she chooses between competing versions of the world and refracts the words of others through her own interpretation and presentation of them (Czarniawska, 2004a; Riessman, 2008): we do not 'write up a culture' but 'write culture' (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Watson, 1995), and the presentation of an interpretation requires deploying rhetorical persuasion in order to justify that interpretation (Corbett-Etchevers & Mounoud, 2011; Watson, 1995). A social constructivist perspective also sees such forms of data as being rooted in a particular context. Whereas grounded theory methodology breaks up individual narratives in order to construct a broader narrative, this research's social constructivist approach considers the individual processes of constructing a sense-making narrative in a particular context to be itself the subject of research. Grounded theory aims to "free[ ] the researcher from description and

forc[e] interpretation to higher levels of abstraction" (Strauss, 1987, p. 55) but this is at the cost of losing "real organic relations between [ ] incidents" (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, p. 68) and the individual storyteller (Riley & Hawe, 2005).

Second, Thomas and James (2006) question whether grounded theory methods can 'discover' theory. They argue that grounded theory conflates and confuses two processes of inquiry which they term "inspiration involving patterning or accommodation" and "explanation and prediction" (G. Thomas & James, 2006, p. 772). As a qualitative research method, grounded theory is about interpretation *i.e.* the former, but it makes claims to be able to 'discover' the latter which can 'explain'. Furthermore, the powers of explanation or causality are highly debatable when considering the social sciences: research might be able to identify patterns of general behaviour, but these must be distinguished from predicting and explaining what a particular individual will do (Sanger, 1996). As Donmoyer puts it, qualitative social research may simply enable us to become "more informed gamblers" (Donmoyer, 2000, p. 51).

Thirdly, a reflexive abductive approach argues that the researcher's role may be seen not as a problem of the claims of an inductive approach, or something that needs to be carefully acknowledged and managed (*c.f.* Corbin & Strauss, 2008) but as wholly necessary for the creation of new knowledge. Sanger (1996) emphasises how the researcher seeking to understand the social constructions and discourses of the research subjects must gain sufficient familiarity – and have sufficient commonality – with those social constructs in order to report them, and to give subjects the necessary space to speak (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). However, the act of reporting those subjective constructs inevitably means disrupting those constructs by the research discourse and the researcher's own interpretation and pre-understandings. Yet Sanger argues that such ruptures are actually a crucial and creative aspect of knowledge, in which new and alternative understandings enter the discourse. Similarly Gubrium and Holstein (2001) argue that the narrated experiences of informants need to be balanced with "a modicum of ethnographic authority" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 329) in order to understand the social contexts and constraints in which such narratives were constructed. The reflexive abductive approach is therefore adopted not so much as a residual position as a necessary one. Knowledge is the product of both pre-understanding and experience, of both theory

and practice (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Silverman, 2006). Theoretical pre-conceptions give the researcher a way into the empirical data; but the empirical data continually challenges those pre-conceptions of the (mindful) researcher (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). The purpose of the research is not to develop theory with which to predict or explain, so much as to expand our repertoire of social constructions and cognitive structures (Donmoyer, 2000). Chapters 2 and 3 set out the particular pre-conceptions and theoretical frameworks which inform this research – a narrative conceptualisation of identity (section 2.6) and a conceptualisation of the medial manager and medial manager identity (sections 3.2 and 3.5); but subsequent sections and chapters will also elaborate the steps taken to ensure continual reflexivity on the part of the researcher, including the need to maintain a creative iteration between researcher conceptions and the data, and not to force one into submission to the other. (See appendix 2 which presents excerpts from the researcher's reflective journal for a specific example reflexively recognising this.)

### 4.3.2 Research generalisability

This research proceeds from the proposition that theory in a social science context represents a repertoire of interpretations or social constructions (Donmoyer, 2000) and does not aim to provide universal explanations or predictions. It further proceeds from the proposition that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions with others, and is therefore contextual and, notwithstanding the effects of dominant wider discourses, primarily local (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). Accordingly this research does not set out to produce knowledge which can be universally generalised.

However, the need for research to be able to generalise either its findings or to develop generalisable theory remains a dominant research paradigm (Donmoyer, 2000), and therefore some further justification of research which does not make such claims is required. Donmoyer (2000) argues that, given how research paradigms frame a particular way of seeing the world and of approaching data, one important function of research is to "expand and enrich the repertoire of social constructions available to practitioners and others" (Donmoyer, 2000, p. 51). Drawing on Piaget's theories of schema he argues that good research should confront the researcher and the reader with difference which stimulates cognitive structures to accommodate novel aspects and leads to greater integration and differentiation within cognitive

schemes. Alvesson and Sandberg similarly argue that the purpose of producing new theories should be to make us look at things differently (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). The purpose of research may therefore be reconceptualised: not to find precise answers, assuming that there is a fixed reality 'out there', but to develop further, more informed questions (Donmoyer, 2000). Accordingly the purpose of this research is not to 'explain' medial manager identity, but to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in a particular context. By bringing a particular theoretical perspective to the research the aim is to assimilate and accommodate new cognitive structures in reflexive iteration with the data, to open up new perspectives which enable researchers and organisations to "perceive more richly and act more intelligently" (Donmoyer, 2000, p. 60).

### 4.3.3 Research validity

Finally, what does research validity mean within such a philosophical framework? Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) cite three classical philosophical criteria for truth: "correspondence" with an objective world; "coherence" within a statement; and the "pragmatic use" to which a truth statement is put. They note that, if the correspondence criteria is rejected by a social constructivist paradigm, not only do the coherence and pragmatic criteria need to be addressed, but that research validity must move from verification to falsification and to a greater reliability on the 'craftsmanship' of the research process: we may not be able to prove that something is true, but we should continually check to see whether it could be shown to be false or undermined. This further emphasises the importance of continuing reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Riessman (1993, 2008) argues that validity rests not so much on truth as on trustworthiness: rather than trying to demonstrate the truth of an interpretation the researcher should be transparent as to how they came to their interpretation (Riessman, 1993; Watson, 1994), their own values and pre-conceptions (Heron, 1996; Stake, 1995) and their relations with their research subjects (Bold, 2012; Dick, 2004; A. Phoenix, 1994).

Kvale and Brinkmann suggest that coherence may be tested through dialogue: between the researcher and the interviewee, between the researcher and the research community, and between the researcher and the reader (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This does not necessarily imply relativism: following Ricoeur (1971) it may be possible to consider different interpretations of a text and to arbitrate between them,

if only provisionally. For researchers such as Stake (1995) seeking and triangulating a variety of perspectives within the research investigation is an essential tool for validity. Simons, however, questions whether triangulation is a useful test: within a social constructionist paradigm there may be a variety of perspectives of a phenomenon which in themselves may more accurately represent the nature of that phenomenon (Simons, 2009). Riessman, whilst generally arguing for the test of coherence within a narrative (and between the narrative accounts of informants and the researcher's theoretical claims), reminds us that such coherence may also be viewed as a western construction and that certain narratives, such as those of trauma victims, may not be able to adhere to such demands (Riessman, 2008). Other social researchers suggest other aspects of a coherence test of validity. The researcher is aiming for a "representative construction" (Bold, 2012, p. 145), "interpretative descriptions that exact fullness and completeness of detail" (van Manen, 1997, p. 17) and the authenticity towards the people portrayed (Clough, 2002). Bold further suggests that, within a narrative framework, the test of validity should be whether stories are relevant and recognisable to readers (Bold, 2012): do they convey something of a common human experience?

A pragmatic test of research validity considers the practical consequences of a truth statement: whether action accompanies the statement, whether it leads to action, and the consequences of the action: whether the practice under investigation is improved (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) or leads to social change (Riessman, 2008). In other words, is the research useful? Does it increase not just understanding but applicable learning? Is it meaningful not just to the academic research community, but to the community who have been studied (Siggelkow, 2007)? The essential test of validity when researching in an organisational context, and against which the research assesses itself, is therefore understood to be the fulfilment of both coherence and pragmatic tests, in being able to both faithfully articulate the complex lived realities of the organisation investigated, and communicating findings and their applications in a sufficiently accessible and realisable way, to enable the organisation and its members to learn from and to utilise its findings.

## 4.4 Research strategy

The chosen research strategy is a case study. Robson defines a case study as "a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (Robson, 2002, p. 178). The contemporary phenomenon being investigated within this research project is *the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association. Specifically the aim is to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible* (section 1.3). The multiple sources of evidence will be discussed in the next section.

Some distinctive features of a case study deserve further attention. First, case study research is about particularisation rather than generalisation. The focus of investigation is on the particular case in its own context and circumstances, and to develop an in-depth knowledge of that case (Clifton, 2014; Ridder, et al., 2014; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995) rather than aiming to generalise across different cases or develop explanatory theories. A case study therefore supports the philosophical position established in section 4.3. The focus on the particular also helps the researcher to avoid investigating 'essential' phenomena (Silverman, 2006) – such as 'The Medial Manager' – and instead to explore a phenomenon in depth in precise contexts (Simons, 2009) by investigating the "fine-grained manner" in which the phenomenon takes place (Clifton, 2014, p. 113). Second, a case is understood as a 'bounded system' (Stake, 1995). Although a case study is a strategy for investigating a phenomenon, case study research aims to understand the case itself – the 'bounded system' – as an entity rather than as a particular problem, relationship or theme (Stake, 1995). That is, the focus of the investigation is the particular context in which the phenomenon occurs, and how the phenomenon occurs within the particular system of relationships. A case study invites the researcher to look for, and to interpret "naturally occurring data" (Silverman, 2006, p. 379), to observe and, as far as possible, experience what research subjects are doing, and to be exposed to the language, categories and narratives that research subjects use in, and to construct, their everyday realities. They also enable the researcher to collect and explore multiple perspectives and contested viewpoints, and the interactions between key actors (Simons, 2009). This acknowledgement of multiple perspectives also

encourages the researcher not to make simplifying judgements as to 'what is really going on' but to understand and reflect the complex and contested nature of multiple social realities (Simons, 2009).

Case studies have been used for a variety of purposes and with a variety of designs. This research project uses a case study strategy in order to explore *the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association* and *to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible* (section 1.3). It is what Stake (1995) calls an Instrumental case study, chosen because it will help to answer a research question, and what Simons (2009) calls Theory-led, in which the case is explored through a particular theoretical perspective. Yin (2003) sets out four types of case study design, based on whether the research investigates a single or multiple contexts (bounded systems), and whether it investigates sub-units within the context(s). This research adopts a Single-Case Embedded design (Yin, 2003). The context or bounded system is a single organisation, but the research also investigates the particular identities and identity work processes of individual medial managers within that organisational context. That is, individual managers are embedded sub-units of analysis within the wider organisational case (Yin, 2003).

An embedded case design has a number of advantages for research into the phenomenon of medial manager identity and identity work. By focusing on the embedded cases of individual medial managers as well as the 'bounded system' of medial managers in a particular organisation, the research is able to explore the relationships and interactions between the self and the social. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that their in-depth case study of a single manager enables both the study of an individual's efforts to navigate between organisational discourses, and the study of the organisation and its discourses through the context of one individual. By using an embedded single case study strategy, the research echoes this approach of maintaining an ongoing iteration between the part and the whole, the self and the social, the manager and the organisation, the personal and collective narratives (Currie & Brown, 2003). Furthermore, by focusing on individual medial managers as well as the case as a whole, the research is able to maintain a focus on the particular and avoid any rush to generalisation which may

impede or overlook individual differences and nuances, and possible new lines of inquiry (Donmoyer, 2000; A. G. Sheard & Kakabadse, 2007; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

## 4.5 Research methods

In this section the key methods of data collection are outlined. The detailed design and administration of research instruments is addressed in chapter 5; here the choice of methods is justified in the context of the research aims, ontology and epistemology. Three methods of data collection are used within the case study strategy: interviews, observations and documentary analysis.

### 4.5.1 Interviews

The research uses interviews with medial managers as the primary source of empirical data. Such a choice needs to be justified on two levels. First, Silverman questions whether interviews are simply a default position in the context of an 'interview society' (Silverman, 2006). More specifically, recent research into identity has suggested an over-reliance on interviews based on a natural inclination to understand people's view of themselves (Coupland & Brown, 2012) and a failure to engage with the ways in which identity is accomplished through social interactions, by 'displaying' one's identity and gaining verification from others (Down & Reveley, 2009; Goffman, 1959) or through positioning oneself in relation to others (McInnes & Corlett, 2012). Informing this call is an increasingly cogent interpretivist critique of the interview, which is not "a pipeline to the interiors of interviewees or the exteriors of social reality" (Alvesson, 2003, p. 30). Interviews are a particular form of social interaction and nothing more (Czarniawska, 2004a): they are a 'contrivance' (Silverman, 2006), a particular occasion for a particular form of talk instigated by the researcher (Kelly, 2008) which creates its own social reality (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). As a method of investigating identity the interview may therefore appear problematic: in speaking of themselves in the context of an interview, interviewees can present themselves in different ways according to their expectations of the interview process, the interviewer and the interview questions (Czarniawska, 2004a; Mishler, 1986; Silverman, 2006). They focus on "perspectives of action" rather than "perspectives in action" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1343). Calls for additional and complementary research into 'naturally occurring' (Down &

Reveley, 2009) or ‘everyday’ (McInnes & Corlett, 2012) talk and action can therefore be seen as a necessary rebalancing of attention from identity as retrospectively constructed self-narration to identity as daily inter-action (Clifton, 2014).

The research justification for using interviews is embedded in its conceptualisation of identity as a continual dynamic between self-identity and social practices through identity work, which is primarily accomplished through narrative and storytelling. The interview may be considered not as a difficulty in getting past self-presentation, but as a means of gaining insight into identity *through* self-presentation. By acknowledging the interview as a particular occasion for constructing a particular social reality (Kelly, 2008) it is possible to investigate the processes by which that social reality is produced (Riessman, 1993). The ways in which interviewees make sense of and represent themselves and their experiences tell us much about how they wish to account for themselves and their actions (Czarniawska, 2004a), their cultural and tacit assumptions (Mishler, 1986) and the processes of selecting, interpreting and transforming events (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997). Although interview talk may be partial and contextual it draws on resources available to the participant and with which they are familiar and concerned (Riessman, 2008): it is “cut from the same kind of cloth as the lives they tell about” (Denzin, 1989, p. 86). Our concern need not be with trying to establish the ‘real’ or ‘external’ nature of the practice that is being described, but with the description itself (Miller & Glassner, 2010): the way someone sees themselves and wishes to be seen. In other words, the interview as a particular social interaction is another occasion for identity work, in which the interviewee responds to the discursive resources available to them and subjectivities impinging upon them, and seeks to make sense of themselves in relation to them.

### 4.5.2 Observations

The research uses observations primarily as a method of investigating the organisational and discursive context in which the interviewed medial managers work; that is, the ‘bounded system’. Observation offers an alternative and complementary way in which the researcher may investigate and understand social interactions within the context of a case study. A number of benefits of observation have been identified. Observation enables the researcher to see research subjects in their own context and acting out their daily lives, which may contrast or complement

social realities presented during an interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Flick, 2009; Simons, 2009) and which are not directed by the researcher's agenda (Collier, 2005). (As noted under section 4.4.3 this form of triangulation should not necessarily aim to test the 'truth' of interview statements, but to explore and identify different social realities in different contexts. Within this social constructivist research (section 4.2) observational data is *not* intentionally used to test or verify the interview statements of managers.) The act of observing brings the researcher closer to the lived experience of the research participants (van Manen, 1997; Waddington, 2004) which may generate creative insights (Patton, 2002). Observation may allow the researcher to gain a more comprehensive picture of the case, and to develop 'thick description' through the observation of particular incidents and events (Geertz, 1973; Simons, 2009; Stake, 1995). Observation may reveal further insights into the values and norms of the culture(s) of the case study (Simons, 2009) beyond those cognitively understood or described by interviewees, such as the ways in which space is used as a resource or to define people and roles (Silverman, 2011) or the ways in which individual narratives have been socially prescribed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001). It may also be a means of finding and acknowledging the voices of those who are less articulate or powerful (Simons, 2009). Finally, the researcher has the opportunity to attempt to observe a case with fresh eyes and to 'mak[e] the commonplace exotic' (Sanger, 1996: 7). By deliberately constructing themselves as an outsider looking at an unfamiliar context the researcher may be able to 'see' and investigate as foreground what is familiar and commonplace background to the research subject (Sanger, 1996).

Nevertheless, the act of observing is as much a 'contrivance' as an interview. The researcher cannot observe everything (Silverman, 2011) but must select what they will focus on as foreground; and Sanger warns against the researcher's unconscious self-selecting bias in this process. What we place in the foreground is what we want to observe, and what we find in the foreground is what we deem to be significant (Sanger, 1996). Sanger also warns the researcher not to underestimate the effect of their presence on those being observed. Observations, like interviews, therefore require continual reflexivity on the part of the researcher and a continual openness both to their own subjectivities and to those of the research subjects.

### 4.5.3 Documentary analysis

The research also analyses organisational documents and artefacts. Documents are socially produced and reflect particular ideas, discourses and taken-for-granted assumptions (Macdonald, 2008) which may reveal some of the social realities which both produce and are produced by the document. The research uses documentary analysis as part of the initial orientation process prior to observations and interviews (Simons, 2009). However, MacDonald notes that developing an understanding of the messages contained within organisational documents may depend on becoming familiar with the language used within the organisation and its culture (Macdonald, 2008) and so documentary analysis is necessarily an ongoing and iterative process between the documents and other social realities interpreted through interviews and observations. Organisational documents used and analysed include job descriptions and person specifications of manager roles; internal documents such as staff newsletters and memos; internal artefacts such as photographs, advertisements and displays, building and room design and organisation; public documents such as the organisational website and annual reports; and external documents such as media reports. The particular focus of analysis of these documents and artefacts is to investigate the social realities constructed by the organisation and its claims as to 'who we are' as an organisation, 'who you are' as organisational members and 'who you are' as managers within the organisation.

## 4.6 Context of the research – the case study organisation

Having set out the philosophical paradigms underpinning the research and having outlined the research strategy of a case study, this final section addresses the selection of the chosen case study organisation: the reasons for selecting the particular case and the benefits of the particular case for investigating the research problem (Siggelkow, 2007).

The chosen case study organisation is 'Panorama Housing', a Registered Social Landlord (RSL, or commonly known as a Housing Association) operating in the North West of England. Panorama Housing is a relatively young organisation, having been formed in 2006 to take over the housing stock of a local authority, 'Seeborough Council'; however, council staff who had managed Seeborough's housing were transferred under TUPE to the new organisation, with the head of

housing services becoming the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Panorama Housing. The organisation currently employs over 250 staff and manages over 11,500 properties within the boundaries of the local authority.

The choice of Panorama Housing as the case study organisation can be justified on a number of grounds. First, and most straightforwardly, it offers the researcher ease of access (Stake, 1995). The CEO has a personal interest in and commitment to management research and learning and was therefore willing to offer the researcher full cooperation and access to the organisation and its managers, including authorising interviews and observations and making relevant documents available. In return the findings of the research will be made available to the organisation in the form of an executive report. Linked to the issue of access, the researcher's own experience of working in housing benefit administration and legal advice services means that they have some experience of similar and shared issues to those of social housing, but without any direct experience of social housing itself. This therefore supports the research position that the researcher should be able to both have sufficient familiarity of the subjects to allow them to speak and to report them, but also sufficient difference to bring new knowledge and perspectives (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Sanger, 1996) (section 4.3.1).

Secondly, the context and environment of social housing provides a particularly interesting discursive context based upon competing and paradoxical discourses. Social housing typically refers to the provision of cheap and affordable housing for those in some kind of housing need such as homelessness or an inability to access other forms of accommodation such as home-ownership (Hutchinson & Ward, 2012; National Housing Federation, 2013; Sprigings, 2002). Housing associations are non-publically funded, not-for-profit businesses, and the Housing Acts of 1974 and 1988 enabled them to gain access to new funding sources including substantial levels of private sector borrowing (Hutchinson & Ward, 2012). This also facilitated the drive by successive governments to introduce a more commercial ethos into the housing sector and for large-scale transfers of local authority housing to existing or newly created housing associations. Housing associations may therefore be characterised as 'quasi-public' or 'social businesses' which are essentially "public sector organisation[s] in private sector clothing" (Collier, 2005, p. 930): they must act as businesses but never wholly as businesses (Gruis & Nieboer, 2004a, 2004b). A

number of issues arise out of this ‘quasi-public’ position and the need to sustain both social and commercial responsibilities. For example, the requirement for tenant representation on housing association management boards (Housing Corporation, 2006) was accompanied by a discourse of involvement, democracy and accountability (Bradley, 2008); yet company law is commonly understood to preclude such models of representation, with directors being responsible to the organisation and its overall good, not to any constituency (Bradley, 2008). As public bodies housing associations are subject to a high degree of regulation and government interference (Gruis & Nieboer, 2004a) which can undermine their ability to manage their assets and leverage finance (Collier, 2005), such as the requirement that tenants retain the Right to Buy following a stock transfer, and most recently the effects of Welfare Reform and the unexpected requirement announced in the summer budget of July 2015 to decrease rents by one percent year on year. It is also debateable to what extent common business models are appropriate to enable quasi-public organisations to manage multiple responsibilities (Collier, 2005; Gruis & Nieboer, 2004a); whether housing association boards and managers have the necessary knowledge and expertise to deal with commercial realities whilst retaining social and professional values (Collier, 2005; K. Jones & Kaluarachchi, 2007; Mason & Royce, 2007); and whether such a tension between commercial and social aims is sustainable (Collier, 2005; McDermott, 2007; Sprigings, 2002). A housing association context therefore suggests a number of particular significant pressures and discourses within which managers must operate and make sense of their roles (Besharov & Smith, 2014; Oldenhof, Postma, & Putters, 2013).

Thirdly, however, Panorama Housing may be considered useful as a non-extreme case. Research by Pawson and Smith (2009) and Preece and Ward (2012) into housing associations formed after stock transfers both find a significant degree of improvement in employee relations and suggestions of increased employee engagement and identification with a new, more commercial and customer-focused ethos in the organisations they studied. Panorama Housing itself has consistently been ranked highly in national employee engagement assessments. The significance for this research is that, whilst Panorama Housing operates within some specific and identifiable tensions, the superficial evidence suggests that its medial managers are not working in an environment of overt conflict between staff and organisational

interests. This enables the research to investigate the everyday interactions and sensemaking of medial managers and to explore the applicability of a medial manager identity typology as a common, rather than an exceptional, social construction.

## 4.7 Methodological limitations

This chapter has set out a philosophical position vis-à-vis what research is able to do and what kind of knowledge it is able to produce. The research does not seek to uncover an objective reality, but understands reality to be socially constructed through social interaction and shared meanings, and observable data to be the interactions between social beings, or the processes of creating social realities. The researcher is understood to be an inevitable and indeed essential part of such social interaction, and research may be understood as the process of jointly constructing meaning with the research subjects through an iteration between the subject's experience and the researcher's theoretical pre-conceptions and 'creative ruptures' (Sanger, 1996); that is, a reflexive abductive approach (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). The purpose of research is not to produce universally generalisable results or explanatory theory, but to deepen understanding of a phenomenon and to expand the available repertoire of social constructions though which the phenomenon may be interpreted and approached (Donmoyer, 2000).

The methodological choice of a case study strategy, using qualitative, unstructured interviews, observations and documentary analysis has two key limitations. First there is a limitation of scale. Although the choice of a case study as a strategy for developing an in-depth understanding of the identities and identity work of medial managers in their organisational context has been justified, the depth of knowledge could be increased by investigating a larger organisation, interviewing more managers and staff members, by conducting a longitudinal study or by investigating multiple organisations. Whereas grounded theory argues that a saturation point may be reached when no further coding categories are identified (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) a social constructivist perspective in which social realities are continually constructed and revised through social interaction precludes achieving such a saturation point. The research must therefore acknowledge that deeper, more nuanced understanding is always possible.

Second, there is a limitation of perspective. The researcher seeks to better understand and interpret the phenomenon being investigated and to develop new possible social constructions. In doing so they bring their own theoretical pre-conceptions to engage with the empirical data: in this case these include a narrative conceptualisation of identity (section 2.6) and a conceptualisation of the medial manager and medial manager identity (sections 3.2 and 3.5). They are not the only possible theoretical pre-conceptions and other perspectives may give rise to alternative interpretations and social constructions. The researcher collects empirical data through 'contrivances' such as interviews and observations. Their theoretical pre-conceptions and their perceptions as unique embodied social beings affect their social interactions with research subjects and their choices as to what to foreground, what they hear or see as significant and the way they interpret that (refracted) empirical data. The way in which they are perceived by the research subjects may affect the talk and actions of those subjects in front of the researcher. This is understood as a limitation rather than a weakness. Within this research paradigm there is no claim or intention to achieve correspondence with any objective reality; all knowledge is necessarily provisional and the product of subjective social interactions. The researcher's responsibility is, through sustained reflexivity, to demonstrate their own subjectivities as clearly as possible and to make the best possible interpretation of empirical data within those subjectivities.

## 4.8 Summary

This chapter has set out the philosophical framework within which the research is conducted. The research proceeds from a nominalist and social constructivist perspective in which reality is understood to be socially constructed through shared labels and meanings; and the aim of research is to understand the ways in which people make sense of their socially constructed worlds. Consistent with this paradigm, the research adopts a reflexive abductive approach in which the researcher's theoretical pre-conceptions are engaged in continual iteration with the empirical data; an understanding of theory not as explanatory or predictive, but as deepening understanding and the expansion of social constructions; and tests of research validity as reflexivity, coherence and practical application. The chapter then set out and justified the research strategy as a single-unit embedded case study in which the units of analysis are both the 'bounded system' of the case organisation

and the individual medial managers within it. Interviews, observations and organisational documents provide complementary methods through which to gather empirical data about the social realities that medial managers construct and the social discourses, values and assumptions within which social realities are produced, and which allow the researcher to gain a comprehensive picture of the case and to develop 'thick description.' Finally the choice of case organisation was justified, and methodological limitations noted, within the context of a social constructivist paradigm.

Having set out the philosophical basis for the research and outlined and justified the research strategy and methods, the next chapter provides full details of the design and administration of the research instruments, procedures for data analysis and consideration of ethical issues.

# Chapter 5 – Methodology (2): data collection and analysis

## 5.1 Introduction

Building on the underpinning philosophical framework for the research set out in chapter 4, and why the research was conducted in particular ways, this chapter addresses the specific application of the research methodology. It presents a detailed description of how data was collected through interviews, observations and documents, including the design and administration of research instruments and how ethical considerations were identified and addressed. It then provides full details of how analysis of the data was carried out, including preparation of the data, the overall analytical strategy and specific methods used, in order to demonstrate research reliability and validity, and to enable the reader to understand and evaluate the conclusions drawn by the researcher.

## 5.2 Data collection

Chapter 2 set out a narrative conceptualisation of identity and argues that narratives are the means by which we use and organise language in order to makes sense of ourselves and our experiences by selecting and constituting events into "meaningful totalities" (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 279). Narratives are understood to be a key way in which individuals construct social realities, and the study of narratives therefore provides insight into the nature of those social realities and the processes by which they are constructed: the social worlds and selves that individuals construct, maintain, repair and reject; the interpretative repertoires and discourses which individuals draw on and are constructed by; and the social functions that such narratives fulfil. Riessman draws attention to the function of narratives in connecting the individual and the social: "To be understood, these private constructions of identity must mesh with a community of life stories or 'deep structures' about the nature of life itself in a particular culture. Connecting biography and society becomes possible through the close analysis of stories" (Riessman, 2008, p. 10). Within this research project the purpose and focus of all methods of data collection – interviews, observations and documentary analysis – is therefore the eliciting, collecting and constructing of personal, organisational and

societal narratives, on the understanding that the one can only be interpreted in the context of the others, in order to investigate the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in Panorama Housing.

All fieldwork took place over a fifteen month period from September 2013 to November 2014.

### 5.2.1 Interviews

Interviews with medial managers followed a largely unstructured design. The focal point of the interview invited the participating manager to narrate a workplace incident or event which they felt captured their own understanding of their role within the organisation. Participants were given this question and some broad guidelines in advance as part of the information sheet issued upon provisional agreement to take part in the research. This was intended to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on their organisational role and to choose a story which they felt was representative of their experience and the meanings they attached to their role, rather than being asked to think of a story 'on the spot'. However, following the advice of Taylor and Bogdan (1984), care was taken to provide participants with a summary of the research which was truthful and yet sufficiently vague so as not to invite defensive or self-conscious behaviour or talk. One single interview was conducted with each manager.

The choice of interview design was informed by the aim and objectives of the research, and particularly to understand *processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between'* by *uncover[ing] how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles* (research objective 3) and by *understand[ing] the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims* (research objective 4). Managers were invited to tell a story about themselves because stories are a familiar and common way in which we introduce ourselves to others (Sims, 2005b) which can nevertheless carry complex meanings about how we see ourselves and others (Beech & Sims, 2007). By inviting managers to narrate a particular workplace story, rather than their career or life history for example, the research sought to focus on the manager's organisational work and role, how they constructed, interpreted and experienced that role and the

personal meanings which they attribute to their role (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004; Koerner, 2014). In this sense the use of stories is similar to how Grant and colleagues (2014) invited health staff to write their own job title as a way of gaining insight into personal meanings held by the postholders. Story elicitation also supports the research aim of exploring the utility of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity and the extent to which such an understanding is recognised by managers and reflected in their talk (research objective 4). By using such a design the influence of the research agenda, and the risk of premature framing was minimised (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Flick, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) in order to maximise the scope of managers to present themselves as they wished. Moreover, in order to explore the range and nature of ways of personally interpreting the organisational position of the medial manager as widely as possible (section 3.5.3), a deliberate decision was taken to try to interview all available managers once, rather than a smaller number over a period of time (i.e. a longitudinal study) to increase the opportunities to identify significant nuances and outliers. A final consideration was a practical one of access. Following an initial meeting with the Chief Executive it became clear that managers were regularly interviewed by a variety of assessors and auditors, and that they might therefore be practised at providing 'polished' answers. The use of story elicitation was therefore also a form of 'creative rupturing' (Sanger, 1996) of the traditional interview format in order to uncover personal as well as organisational meanings.

The interviews were organised into three main stages. Following introductions the interviewee was asked a small number of largely closed questions such as how long they had worked for the organisation and how they had been appointed to their current role. These were included at the beginning of the interview in order to 'warm up' the interviewee with some relatively straightforward questions (King, 2004). The second stage comprised the interviewee being invited to narrate their story, with the researcher listening carefully and only offering minimal prompts if necessary to encourage the story-telling, following guidance suggested by Wengraf's (2001) Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method. In the third stage the researcher then explored the story with the manager. This included: what the story meant to the manager and their role within the organisation; how the manager came to understand their organisational role and important influences; how they thought other

organisational members viewed them and their function; the manager's views on other participants in the story; and their views on significant organisational members who did not feature and why they did not feature. (It should be noted that within the interview schedule, the term 'role' is used simply to convey the sense of 'what you are here to do' and as a means of gaining insight into manager identity, and not to suggest that role is the same as identity (*c.f.* Davies & Harre, 1990; Pratt, et al., 2006; Stryker & Burke, 2000)). Following the suggested approaches of Wengraf (2001) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000) the researcher used a set of follow-up questions which were designed to enable exploration of these key themes, to facilitate further details of the story where necessary and to elicit further stories. However, the use of any question and the order of asking was dependent on the story told by the interviewee, in order to avoid detracting from the interviewee's own meaning-making frame (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Wengraf, 2001). Details of the interview schedule are presented in appendix 1A.

The interviews were conducted as follows. Twenty two managers in Panorama Housing were identified as meeting the research definition of a medial manager. These represented three hierarchical levels, from team leaders managing non-managerial staff, through service managers to operations directors reporting to the executive group. It was therefore possible to include all medial managers within the case *i.e.* a census (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007) and for the research to achieve an in-depth understanding of both the case organisation and its 'embedded units' (Yin, 2003) within the time and resource constraints of the research. All twenty two managers were invited to an interview and twenty one accepted.

The interviews were arranged through the CEO's personal assistant, who booked interview rooms, scheduled managers according to their availability and issued electronic meeting invitations. The researcher was copied into the invitations and was able then able to thank the manager for agreeing to participate, and to provide an information sheet and consent form setting out the purpose and format of the interview, the invitation to think of a story about themselves, and explaining their right to confidentiality and anonymity. All interviews were digitally recorded with the express agreement of the manager. Interviews averaged just over one hour in length; the shortest was forty minutes and the longest was seventy five minutes.

### 5.2.2 Observations

The collection of observational data also followed a largely unstructured design. The purpose of collecting data through observations and through organisational documents and artefacts was to collect wider organisational and societal narratives within which context medial managers at Panorama Housing construct their own self-narratives, and to be able to complement the fuller stories told by managers at interview with terser storytelling in a social and conversational context (Boje, 1991). The collection of observational data was therefore deliberately not systematic (Simons, 2009) but opportunistic and intuitive. Observational data was collected at what Spradley (1980) calls the 'descriptive' level and was noted by the researcher using a blank template. All observations were carried out with the researcher in an 'observer as participant' role (R. Burgess, 1984; Gill & Johnson, 2002), that is where the researcher's role is recognised and understood by the research subjects (see section 5.3.1), where the researcher does not play any active role in the activities being observed, and keeps interaction with research subjects to a minimum during the observed activity.

The selection of individuals and events to observe were strongly informed by conversations with medial managers. At the close of each interview the manager was asked whether they would be willing to be shadowed for up to half a day in their daily work. Some were very positive and arrangements were made based on the manager's work schedule. Other managers suggested specific events that they thought would be of interest and these offers were similarly taken up. Service managers were also asked whether they were willing for the researcher to attend a monthly team meeting which each of them chaired for their service areas. Observations took place over a seven month period. In total eight medial managers were shadowed for up to four hours and four team meetings and four other meetings were observed, totalling over 35 hours. Observations were also made informally during visits to the organisation, whilst waiting to interview managers.

### 5.2.3 Documents and artefacts

The purpose of collecting organisational documents and artefacts was similarly to collect wider organisational and societal narratives: that is, the discursive context in which medial managers worked. However, a particular focus of the collection of

organisational documents was the ways in which the organisation sought to present itself to its staff and to its external environment. In this sense the collection of documentary data became increasingly 'focused' and 'selected' (Spradley, 1980) with a particular emphasis on the organisational website as its public face or persona.

Documentary data was collected over a fifteen month period. Internal data was collected during the seven months in which interviews and observations were carried out, including team meeting minutes and agendas, internal newsletters and the job descriptions of each manager interviewed. Photographs were taken to capture organisational artefacts such as notice boards, posters, pictures and displays of awards. External data was collected from the organisation's website. Prior to starting interviews and observations the website was explored in order to gain an initial impression of the organisation's public face and presented culture. After completing the on-site fieldwork each web page was systematically captured and uploaded to qualitative analysis software (see section 5.4.1) for analysis.

In keeping with the emerging focus on the organisation's self-presentation, interviews with the CEO and with two executive directors were also conducted. Unlike the interviews with medial managers the purpose of these interviews was to clarify and further explore the perspectives of executive management on the organisation, its vision and purpose and its expectations of managers. Key themes in both interviews included the organisational story, the organisational vision, how the vision is communicated and sustained, the intended role of managers, and manager training and development.

## 5.3 Ethical considerations

Although ethical considerations are specifically addressed in the context of direct interaction with the participating organisation and managers, this research recognises and reflects the claim of Edwards and Mauthner (2002, p. 16) that "ethics concern the morality of human conduct. In relation to social research, it refers to the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of researchers throughout the research process". Murphy and Dingwell (2001) identify four ethical issues which may be used to frame such deliberations, choices and accountability: non-maleficence; beneficence; autonomy or self-determination; and justice. This section addresses each of these issues in turn.

### 5.3.1 Non-maleficence

The avoidance of harm is generally considered to be a cornerstone of ethical practice (Saunders, et al., 2007). Bell and Bryman (2007) identify six further principles relating to the interests of research participants and those potentially affected by the research project which may be treated as supporting the overall avoidance of harm: respecting the dignity of participants; ensuring the fully informed consent of research participants; protecting the privacy of research subjects; ensuring the confidentiality of research data; protecting the anonymity of individuals and organisations; and avoiding deception.

Berg (2001) refers to 'knowing consent' which highlights the researcher's responsibility not only to provide information to participants but to check their actual knowledge and understanding. The research proceeded on the basis that informed consent is not a single decision, but an ongoing process which must be checked at each stage of the research process (Silverman, 2011; Simons, 2009). Nevertheless, some effort was made to ensure that the information sheets given to managers who participated in interviews and/or observations fully set out the implications of their involvement from the collection of data to its eventual use and publication. The content of the information sheets drew on suggested good practice (Saunders, et al., 2007; Silverman, 2011) and included detailed information on the nature and purpose of the interview, the time and other requirements for taking part, the way the data would be collected, stored and used, the participant's rights including the right to withdraw at any point or to not answer any question and the right not to have the interview digitally recorded, the fact that all data would be kept securely and confidentially and that no data collected would be attributable to any individual. Before each interview or work shadowing the participant was asked to confirm that they had been able to read and understand the information sheet, given the opportunity to ask questions and, in the case of interviews, asked whether they agreed to the interview being digitally recorded. The participant was invited to sign a consent form to confirm that they were happy to proceed. At the beginning of each observed meeting or activity the researcher spoke to all participants and confirmed the purpose of the research and procedures for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality.

The participating organisation and managers are referred to by pseudonyms, and care was taken to ensure that any contextual information provided, and the presentation of the data would not be sufficient to enable the identification of the organisation, any manager or any organisational member referred to by a participant. Procedures for the secure handling and storage of data are detailed under section 5.4.1.

One particular aspect of 'knowing consent' (Berg, 2001) concerned the participant's perceptions of the purpose and interests of the research and the researcher (Whittle, Mueller, Lenney, & Gilchrist, 2014). At a preliminary meeting to agree terms of access the CEO of Panorama Housing advised that managers were used to being interviewed both by auditors and by student researchers and suggested that "they will see you as an academic who is testing and assessing their management skills". As a result of this advice the wording of the participant information sheet was reviewed to further emphasise the research concern with personal perceptions of the organisational role, and care was taken at the start of each interview to reinforce this particular aim. Similarly, the participant information sheet for work-shadowing clearly stated that the purpose was "not to assess or judge you as a manager. The aim is to understand the kind of work you do, and the environment in which you do it". The interview format was also deliberately designed to encourage participants to discuss their personal understandings of their roles and to minimise attempts to offer what might be anticipated as 'good' answers (see section 5.2.1). Nevertheless, the researcher strove to remain reflexively attentive to the possible perceptions of research participants throughout the research process. This need was reinforced by the fact that a number of participants brought up the purpose of the research during interviews, necessitating 'on-the-spot' responses (Whittle, et al., 2014), and most of these participants appeared to continue to presume that the purpose was one of assessing the organisation and/or its managers in some way.

### 5.3.2 Beneficence

Whereas non-maleficence involves avoiding any harm as a result of research, beneficence demands that the research serves some positive good; that is, it is not merely research for its own sake (Murphy & Dingwell, 2001). In this vein Bryman suggests that poor quality research which does not add to knowledge may be considered unethical (Bryman, 2008). Writing within a paradigm of Buddhist mindfulness, Bentz and Shapiro set the bar still higher for the researcher in respect of

beneficence: they argue that not only should the researcher take care of the 'lifeworld' in which they enter and investigate, but that research participants should be left in a better state than before the research (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

The research addresses Bryman's concerns by setting out the ways in which the research aims to demonstrate the reliability and validity of its data and interpretations (chapters 4 and 5) and by setting out clear research aims which seek not only to contribute to academic knowledge of processes of identity and identity work, but also be of practical use to organisations. In particular it has set out the specific tests of coherence and pragmatic use by which its validity should be judged (section 4.3.3) Further to this, an executive report summarising the research findings will be made available to Panorama Housing. The research also proceeds on the assumption that rather than doing research 'to' participants it may be done 'with' them as partners and co-investigators in the research conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; van Manen, 1997). Czarniawska (2004a) observes that interview participants may gain particular value from the opportunity to reflect on their practice and to try out new thoughts and reflections without practical *i.e.* organisational consequences, while Waddington (2004) finds that observational participants may be flattered by the researcher's attention and interest in their lives. Several managers reflected that they had valued the opportunity to take time to talk about themselves and their practice. As one manager put it:

> *Because when you're <u>on</u> the front line...you're just <u>dealing</u> with things as they come at you, because that's what's important to customers, and that's why you're there. So it's interesting to sit and talk about it and think about – well what type of manager are you, ahh! (laughs) Thank you. It was good. –* Abbott, Service Manager

### 5.3.3 Autonomy

Autonomy, or self-determination, means respecting the values and decisions of research participants (Murphy & Dingwell, 2001). Some key aspects of this criterion have already been discussed above: ensuring participants are able to choose to participate, or to withdraw, in full knowledge of the implications; and treating research participants as co-investigators whose own concerns and interests, as well as their perceptions about the research question, have value. A third key aspect

involves what Bentz and Shapiro refer to as preparing a space for participants to become: “Mindful inquiry is a creative act. It seeks not only to discover or to record what is there, but to allow what is there to manifest itself in a new way, to come forward in its ‘shining’” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 54). This also implies the need to allow and enable the participant to be ‘disobedient’ (Latour, 2000); that is, to say things which do not fit or challenges the researcher’s understanding or conceptual framework (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Bentz and Shapiro suggest that the creation of such spaces begins with the formation of the research question: what kind of things have been invited to appear and in what form (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998)? The researcher’s reflexivity therefore needs to attend to the continuing cycle of interrogating the research question and its basis in the light of empirical data, and vice versa.

### 5.3.4 Justice

Justice within research ethics demands that all people are treated equally (Murphy & Dingwell, 2001). The research project aims to address the demands of justice in two ways. First, the use of interview and observational protocols support the researcher to behave in similar and consistent ways with each research participant. Second, the research project considers research reflexivity to be an essential cornerstone of its philosophy and practice (5.2.2). Reflexivity may particularly help to facilitate justice towards research participants by enabling the researcher to reflect on her own values, social context, culture, paradigms and research community (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Stake, 1995) and how she may be interpreted and constructed by her research subjects (Bold, 2012; Cooper, 2008). More specifically a personal learning journal (Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 2007) was maintained during the course of the whole research project, which captured reflections on the research progress and practice, including feelings and emotional responses (Bold, 2012; King, 2004; Simons, 2009). As Watson (1995) observes, the act of actually writing about one’s acts elicits greater insights and reflection than is usually possible during the original act. During fieldwork the journal was used as a means of reviewing each interview and observation, reflecting on the researcher’s conduct and its possible effects on the research participant(s). See appendix 2 for excerpts which illustrate the researcher’s reflections on gaining access and her relationship with the organisation, and on conducting interviews (and in particular the extent to which

participants appeared to initially verify or challenge the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity).

## 5.4 Data analysis

This section describes the procedures by which the data collected through fieldwork was analysed. First, it describes the ways in which the collected data was handled, prepared and analysed in order to demonstrate how the researcher has ensured research reliability and validity (as defined within the research paradigm and set out under section 4.3.3) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Second, it describes the handling, preparation and analysis of data in such a way that the reader can follow the procedures, understand the basis on which conclusions are drawn and be able to make some evaluation both of those conclusions and of the researcher's own reflexivity (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Riessman, 1993; Stake, 1995; Watson, 1994).

### 5.4.1 Data preparation

All interview data was captured electronically and transcribed. The production of interview transcripts included an explicit choice (Riessman, 2008) to minimally 'clean up' the conversation in order to assist its accessibility to the reader, while still reflecting the interactions between the informant and the researcher, incorporating the researcher's verbal and non-verbal contributions and interventions, and the informant's hesitations, false starts and trailing off. This reflects the Bakhtinian perspective that all speech is made in response to and in anticipation of an audience (Bakhtin, 1935/1981/1994; Plummer, 1995). More critically, it reflects some of the direct and indirect effects of the researcher on the construction of the informant's narrative and social reality; and it supports both the researcher and the reader to reflexively consider the limitations of their understanding, the ways in which their research agenda dictated or influenced the conversation and the limitations of words in communicating an embodied experience (Riessman, 2008; Watson, 1995). However, it also recognises that any act of documenting social processes determines a particular version and starts to "dissolve the gestalt of the events into a multitude of specific details" (Flick, 2009, p. 302). Interviews were transcribed by a third party, drawing on a basic transcription system suggested by King and Horrocks (2010) (appendix 1B). Immediately after each interview a summary was written up from

notes to capture initial impressions and ideas. On receiving the interview transcript the interview was then listened to whilst reading the transcript in order to check the transcription and to prompt any recollections of accompanying non-verbal gestures and facial expressions. An illustrative excerpt of an interview transcript is included in appendix 1C.

Observational data was collected through hand-written notes, which were then written up either immediately on-site in electronic format using a laptop or as soon as possible afterwards (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Waddington, 2004). Documentary and photographic data were captured as electronic files.

All collected data was uploaded to NVivo, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package. The use of software to analyse qualitative data is increasingly common but not uncontroversial: for example Charmaz (2003) questions whether it belongs to a more positivist approach and risks fragmenting data and removing them from their contextual origins. However, CAQDAS is able to support qualitative analysis procedures in a number of ways, including enabling the researcher to switch quickly and seamlessly between macro and micro levels of analysis (Lewins, 2008) and thus supporting the embedded unit case study design (Yin, 2003); the facility to easily review, revise and amend coding categories as greater familiarity with the data is developed (Flick, 2009) whilst maintaining a clear audit trail (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Veal, 2005); and the means of easily accessing and organising large amounts of disparate data (Flick, 2009). Charmaz's concerns were addressed in two ways. First, procedures for collecting and analysing data, including the theoretical foundations, were clearly established before NVivo was used as an analytical resource: in other words, it is used as a tool to support an appropriate methodology, and not as the architect of the methodology (Lewins, 2008). Second, the medial manager interview texts were retained as coherent units of analysis, with NVivo being used to identity key content, rather than to parse and reorganise the data.

All data was collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act and the guidance provided by the Information Commissioner (Data Protection Act, 1998; The Information Commissioner's Office, 2013) with particular reference to the eight principles of data collection. All data was securely stored by the researcher away

from the organisation and was password-protected. All data was anonymised: the identities of informants were held separately to the data and linked only by an identification code for the duration of the fieldwork, in order to enable the researcher to follow up particular lines of enquiry with informants. After the fieldwork was complete the identification list was destroyed, leaving the collected data anonymous and therefore no longer subject to the Data Protection Act (King & Horrocks, 2010). Informants are identified in the public presentation of the research by pseudonyms. Digitally recorded data was securely destroyed following transcription. No sensitive personal data, as defined by the Data Protection Act (1998) was collected.

### 5.4.2 Analytical strategy

Analysis of the data addressed four distinct stages. These are summarised in figure 2, which also sets out which of the research objectives are addressed at each stage. However, although the four stages are presented consecutively both in figure 2 below and in the presentation of the findings (chapters 6, 7 and 8) the actual process of analysis proceeded in a much more iterative and cyclical way.

Stage 1 consists of a thematic analysis of observational and documentary data in order to identify the key discourses within Panorama Housing and its environment: that is, the discursive context in which medial managers worked. This provides the necessary background with which to address research objectives 3, 4 and 5. Stage 2 comprises a structural analysis of the medial manager interview texts and particularly the stories they told about themselves and their organisational role. The structural analysis took two forms, which reflects and further develops the method demonstrated by Gregg (2006) in combining syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis. Narrative analysis identifies and categorises the narrative or syntagmatic structures of the stories told by medial managers, and the narrative role(s) that they adopted and ascribed to others. Paradigmatic analysis identifies and categorises the particular social worlds constructed by managers in their stories by looking for sets of oppositions within which the managers positioned themselves through their stories. In other words the analysis seeks to uncover the processes of identity work accomplished by, and through the ways in which manager stories are constructed (C. Phoenix, et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008). Stage 2 therefore represents the self-presentations of medial managers, and the personal meanings of their organisational

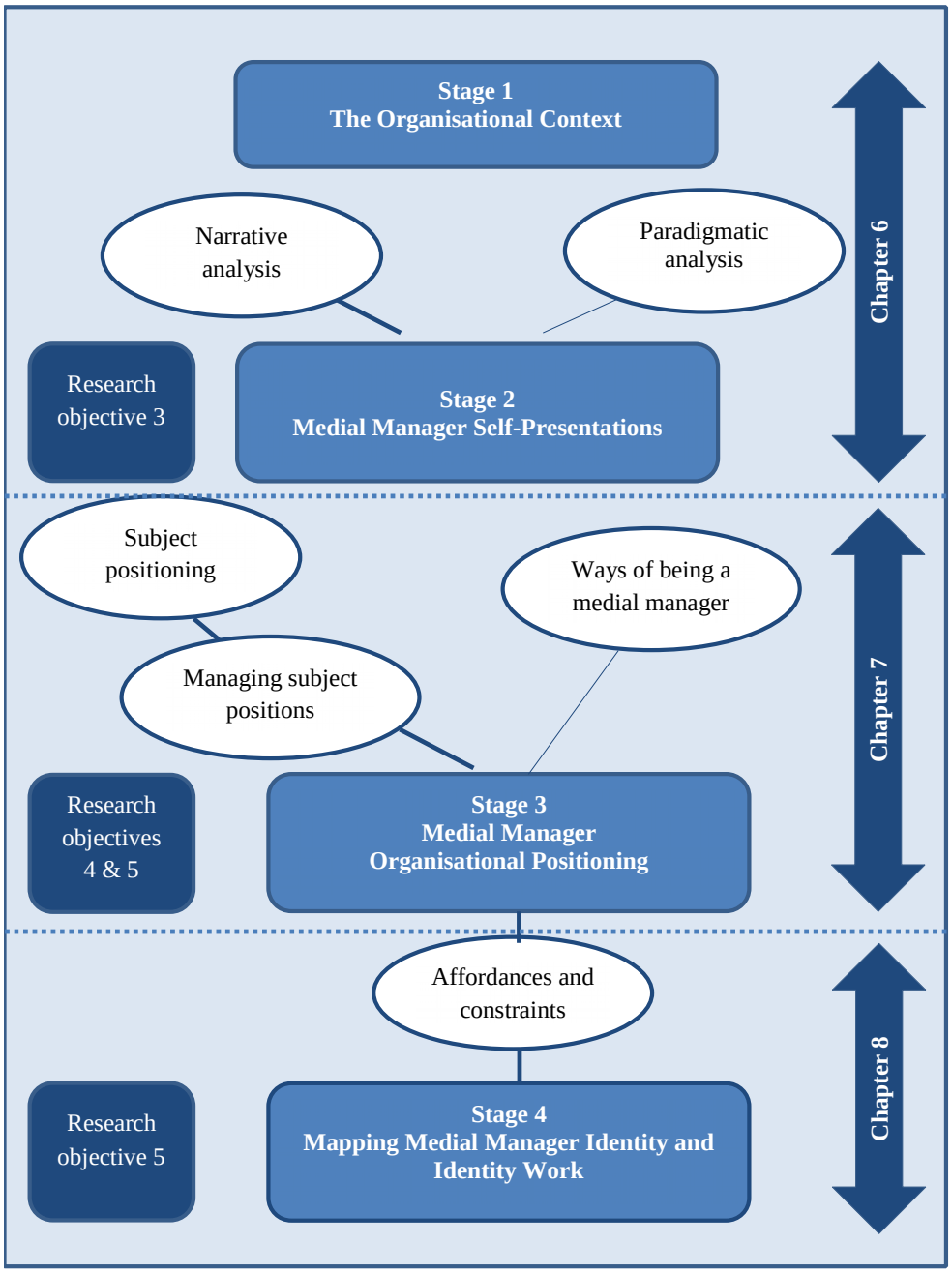


**Figure 2 – Summary of the four stage analytical process**

role within a personal interpretation of their organisational and social world. It draws directly upon the narrative conceptualisation of identity established in section 2.6, of identity as a dynamic, continuous and reciprocal process between self-identity as the self reflexively understood over time at any point, and identity regulation of discursive practices, through processes of identity work which are primarily accomplished through narrative and storytelling. In doing so it addresses research

objective 3: *to uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles*.

The third stage of analysis aims to contextualise the self-presentations of medial managers within the research conceptualisation of the medial manager position within the organisation. In doing so it operationalises the research conceptualisation of manager identity presented in section 3.5. Whereas stage 2 analyses the identity work undertaken through stories and the personal meanings revealed through those stories, stage 3 analyses the identity work undertaken in response to the particular organisational context and position of the medial manager. This stage includes three analytical processes. First, medial manager texts are analysed in terms of the effects of discursive practices and to identify which possible identities or subject positions medial managers recognised in their interview texts. The second stage analyses the ways in which medial managers respond to and manage such possible identities and the discursive claims on them. In the third stage the medial manager texts are analysed in terms of their individual presented responses to possible subject positions in order to characterise the range of possible ways in which managers may interpret and construct their organisational position, or 'ways of being a manager'. Stage 3 therefore addresses research objective 4: *To understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims*; and starts to address research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.*

In the fourth and final stage of analysis these medial manager positionings are analysed in the context of their stories, their construction of a personal social world and their responses to discursive claims in order to identify key factors which afford and constrain different organisational positionings and the construction of a particular medial manager identity. This stage therefore addresses research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.*

The analytical strategy seeks to understand the particular discursive context in which medial managers work at Panorama Housing; the personal workplace identities

which medial managers construct through stories; and to analyse them in the context of their organisational position as medial managers. The strategy therefore reflects, and is informed by the embedded case study design (Yin, 2003). The focus of a case study investigation is not so much the phenomenon itself but the particular context – the case, or 'bounded system' – in which the phenomenon occurs, and how the phenomenon occurs within that particular system of relationships (Stake, 1995). The analytical strategy therefore addresses both the individual (embedded) cases of medial managers through structural analysis (stage 2) and the organisational case or bounded system through analysis of the relationships between individual medial manager texts and between those texts and organisational discourse (stages 1, 3 and 4). Such a strategy also addresses a number of related methodological issues: the balancing between openness to the specificity of individual texts and openness to wider, structural issues (Flick, 2009; King & Horrocks, 2010) by incorporating both within the strategy; the need to maintain the coherence and integrity of individual narratives and texts rather than simply fracturing them into categories of meaning (C. Phoenix, et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008; Riley & Hawe, 2005); and the importance of contextualising texts and their interpretation (Silverman, 2006).

### 5.4.3 Analytical methods

In keeping with a reflexive abductive approach (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009) the analysis used a mixture of pre-existing analytical categories and interpretative frameworks, and categories and themes derived from the data. Figure 3 summarises the use of pre-existing categories at different stages of the analytical process. However, as with Figure 2, the summary should not be taken as reflecting a highly structured or planned analytical approach, but as capturing the final outcomes in retrospect. Metaphorically the analytical process may be compared to journeying through a terrain for the first time, using only a very basic map to determine the overall direction. Much of the analytical process was emergent in response to particular problems or possibilities opened up by immersion in and engagement with the data and using particular analytical methods, and characterised by continual reflexive shifting in focus from the detail of the data to the emerging findings and the overall direction determined by the research question and aims, and particularly between the integrity of the medial manager interview texts and the development of wider, cross-cutting themes.

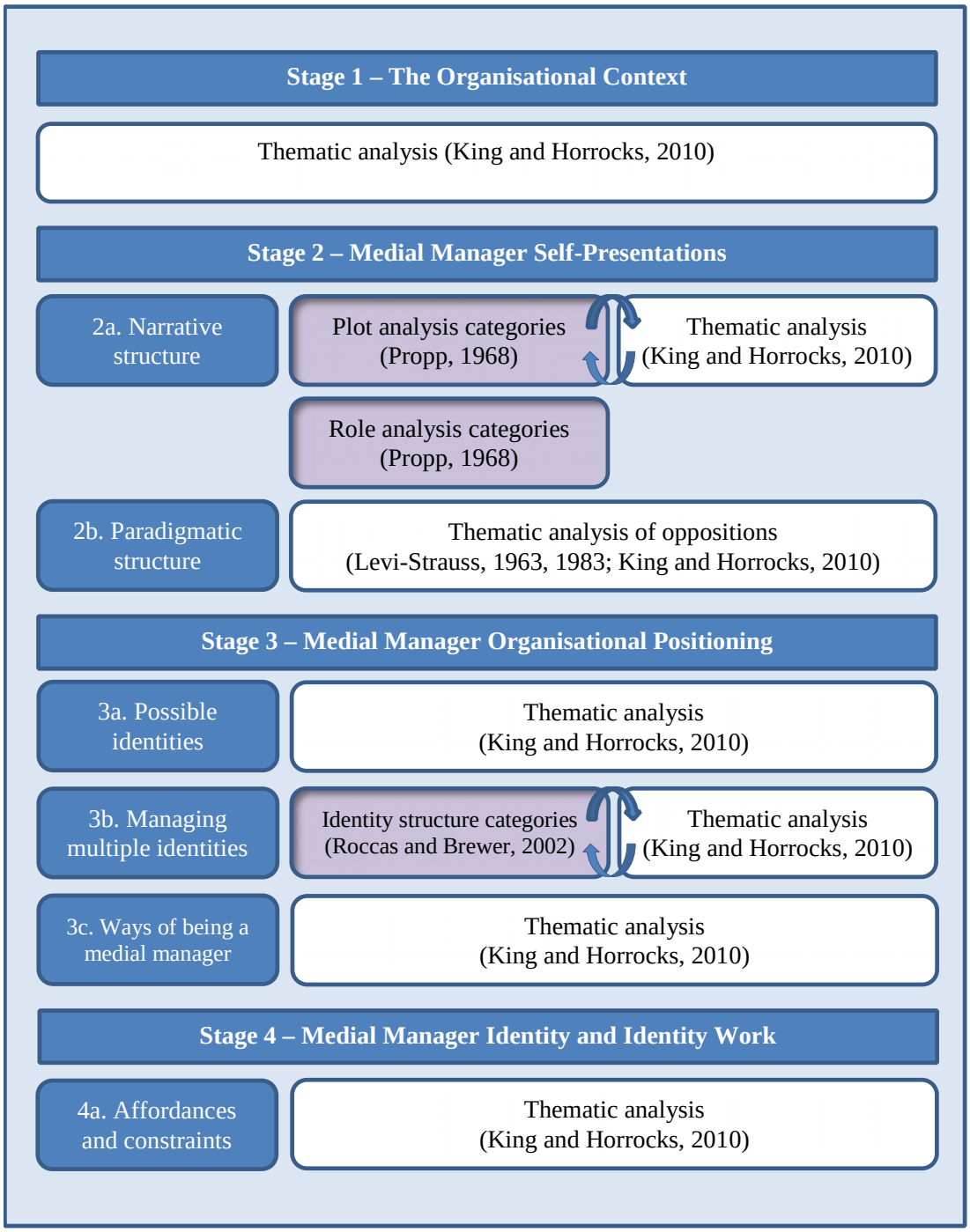


**Figure 3 – Summary of analytical methods**

This section sets out the specific analytical methods and techniques used at each stage of the analytical process.

### Stage 1 – The organisational context

Analysis of the observational and documentary data in order to identify the discursive context of Panorama Housing followed a method of thematic analysis

suggested by King and Horrocks (2010). Each document or observational record was uploaded to NVivo. Initially the text was read through several times to gain an overall familiarity with its content, with comments added using NVivo memos to capture initial thoughts, impressions and ideas. Descriptive codes were then developed to capture different concepts expressed in the texts. As more texts were read and coded these initial descriptive codes were reviewed and refined. In the next stage of coding the list of descriptive codes were reviewed to ensure that they reflected distinct concepts, with some similar codes being merged. Interpretative codes were then developed by looking for relations between descriptive codes to form clusters. At this point it became important to be able to describe each interpretative cluster, and this started to suggest that the process was developing sets of characteristics of the organisation based on distinctive discourses. Finally overarching themes were derived from the interpretative codes to develop a higher level of abstraction. A key informing question at this final stage was: How would the organisation describe itself? Or: What kind of organisation would it call itself? An example of how such coding proceeded is illustrated in figure 4.

**Stage 2 – Medial manager self-presentation**

Narrative analysis of the medial manager interview texts draws on the work of the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp (1968). Based on analysis of one hundred Russian folk tales, Propp concludes that they can be broken down into a limited number of specific narrative functions carried out by specific *dramatis personae* or narrative roles (Propp, 1968): the folk tales all follow a small and easily recognisable number of plots, which nevertheless may be re-told in many different ways featuring different characters and events. Propp draws attention to the "two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and colour, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition" (Propp, 1968, p. 21): tales may be superficially very different but they draw on common and familiar structures.

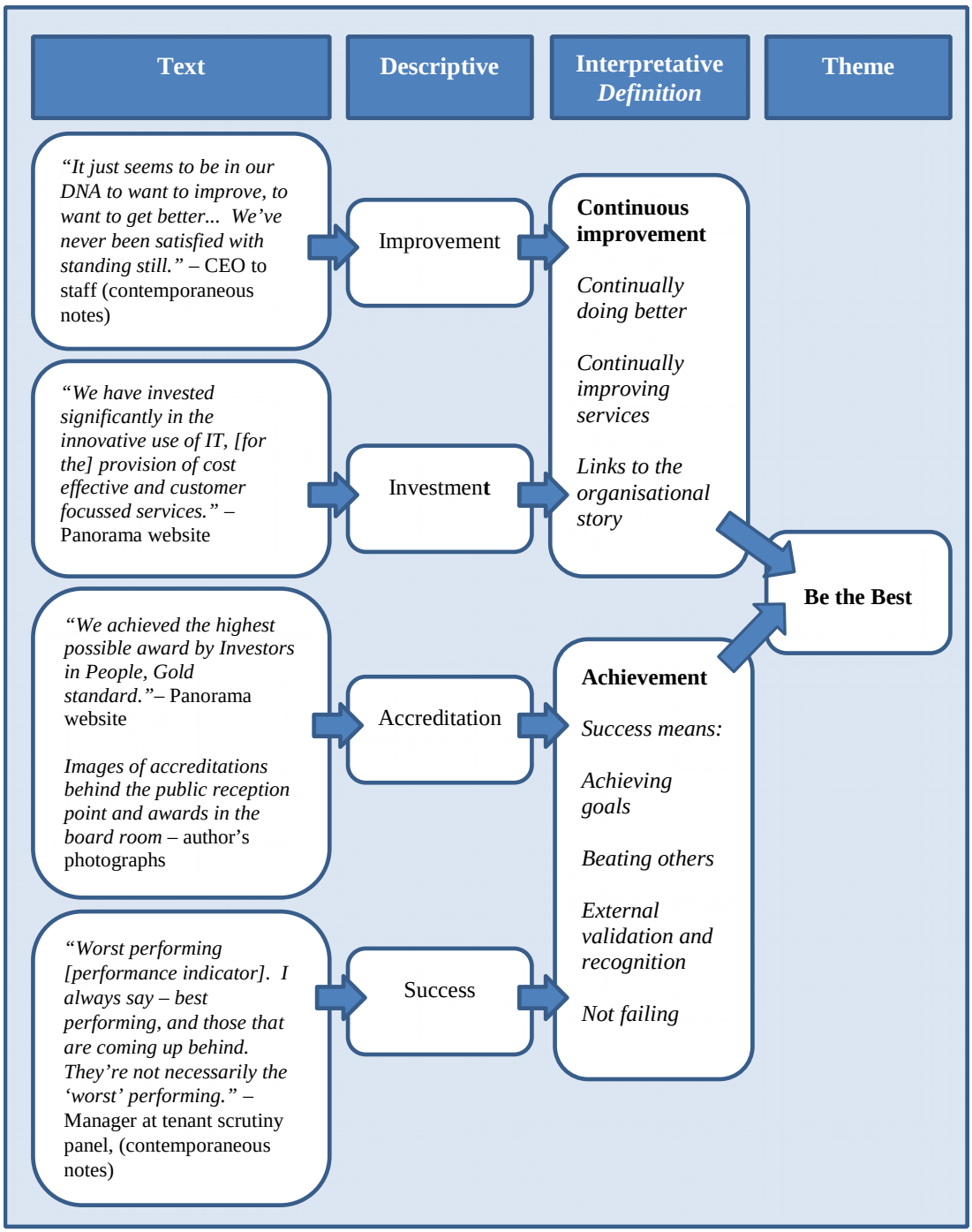


**Figure 4 – Illustrative example of thematic coding**

The value of a Russian formalist analysis of Russian folktales for understanding the experiences and identities of contemporary western managers may not be immediately obvious, but the choice can be justified on a number of grounds. First, although Propp's analysis derives from a culturally specific source (and Propp himself was not concerned with the cultural context in which the tales were told (Dundes, 1968)) the overall structure and narrative functions identified are

recognisable as wider Indo-European story forms, such as western European fairy tales, saints lives, Greek myths and Anglo Saxon epics which remain familiar within contemporary western culture (Dundes, 1968). Propp's set of narrative functions therefore offers a way in which to identify the syntagmatic structure of medial manager stories as a recognisable story genre (Gergen, 2001; Gregg, 2006). That is, the research is founded on a narrative paradigm that individuals make sense of themselves and their experiences through selecting and organising events and characters in particular, socially prescribed and accessible ways (Koerner, 2014; Wertsch, 2013). The question is therefore more precisely whether the heroic folktale form is an appropriate story genre to use as a method of analysis, and it is argued that it is not a large conceptual leap to see the manager's organisational experience as analogous to a folk tale. Managers are expected to act decisively to overcome problems – indeed the word 'heroic' is often employed to describe ideal leaders and managers within organisations – and organisational activities are often conceived of and experienced as struggle with or against opposing forces or between good and bad (e.g. Brown & Humphreys, 2006; McKenna, 2010; Sims, 2005a; Whittle, et al., 2009). Moreover, the method does not preclude managers from telling stories which do not fit a hero-centric form, but provides a means of identifying and contrasting such stories. Finally, the research does not use Propp's narrative functions and roles as fixed categories but as an analytical framework which can be developed and adapted to reflect the cultural context of the contemporary manager (see for example table 2 and sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3).

Using Propp's narrative functions and roles as an analytical tool may also be justified on other grounds. First, they provide a simple organising structure which may serve as a backdrop in order to reveal differences, outliers and nuances between stories. The purpose of the analysis is not to reduce manager stories to a set of types, but to investigate the particular identity work accomplished through stories and the ways in which they are constructed and populated (Beech & Sims, 2007). Second, using a pre-conceived analytical framework offers an opportunity to make "novel connections" (Brown & Toyoki, 2013, p. 881) between the stories managers told and manager experience and identity work, through the 'creative rupturing' of manager talk (Sanger, 1996), that is, through reading manager stories as folk tales. Thirdly, the extensive review of narrative methods and underpinning ontological and

epistemological paradigms by Rosile and colleagues (2013) suggests that the use of such formalist analytical tools can be consistent with an interpretivist and social constructivist paradigm, a position also supported by Beech and Sims (2007). Propp's set of narrative functions are summarised in table 1 below, and his set of narrative roles or *dramatis personae* in table 2.

Although Propp's categories formed the basis of the narrative analysis, the analytical process also iteratively adapted and developed them to accommodate and reflect the cultural context of the contemporary medial manager (*c.f.* Dundes, 1968). Initially each interview text was read through several times to gain an overall familiarity with its content, with comments added through NVivo annotations to capture early thoughts and impressions (King & Horrocks, 2010). This process included developing an initial reading of the narrative structure by applying Propp's definition of a tale as any development proceeding from villainy or a lack, through intermediary functions to a denouement (Propp, 1968); this enabled an initial determination of the nature of the chosen story(s) and whether it functioned as a complete story or as an element of a wider story. From this initial reading the interview text was then coded according to Propp's narrative functions, and according to the actors adopting the narrative roles (Propp, 1968). This process was highly iterative and involved regularly reviewing the emerging narrative structure according to Propp's narrative functions and roles against the reading of the interview text as a whole, and clarifying and refining the reading of narrative functions within it.

| No. | Narrative Function | Narrative Turn | Description |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | Initial Situation | Initial Situation | The initial situation e.g. family members are enumerated, future heroic status is indicated |
| 1 | Absentation | Preparatory<br><br>Setting up the first move of either lack or villainy | One of the family members leaves home |
| 2 | Interdiction | | An interdiction is addressed to the hero |
| 3 | Violation | | The interdiction is violated |
| 4 | Reconnaissance | | The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance |
| 5 | Delivery | | The villain finds information about his victim |
| 6 | Trickery | | The villain attempts to deceive the victim |
| 7 | Complicity | | The victim submits to the deception and unwittingly helps the villain |
| 8 | Villainy | Complication<br><br>The first move – villainy or lack which must be resolved. | The villain causes harm or injury to a member of a family |
| 8a | Lack | | One member of a family lacks something or desires something |
| 9 | Mediation or Connective Incident | | The misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or is dispatched |
| 10 | Beginning Counteraction | | The hero agrees to or decides on counteraction |
| 11 | Departure | | The hero leaves home |
| 12 | The Donor | Donors<br><br>Testing the hero | The hero is tested, interrogated or attacked which prepares the way for receiving a magical agent or helper |
| 13 | The Hero's Reaction | | The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor |
| 14 | Acquisition of a Magical Agent | From the entry of the helper to the end of the first move.<br><br>This may constitute the end of the story, or the story may end with a wedding. | The hero acquires the use of a magical agent |
| 15 | Spatial Transference | | The hero is transferred, delivered or led to the object of a search |
| 16 | Struggle | | The hero and the villain join in direct combat |
| 17 | Branding | | The hero is branded or marked |
| 18 | Victory | | The villain is defeated |
| 19 | Liquidation | | The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated |
| 20 | Return | | The hero returns |
| 21 | Pursuit | | The hero is pursued |
| 22 | Rescue | | The hero is rescued from pursuit |
| 23 | Unrecognised Arrival | The second move<br><br>The hero has to prove themselves to a sceptical audience. | The hero, unrecognised, arrives home or in another country |
| 24 | Unfounded Claims | | A false hero presents unfounded claims |
| 25 | Difficult Task | | A difficult task is proposed to the hero |
| 26 | Solution | | The task is resolved |
| 27 | Recognition | | The hero is recognised |
| 28 | Exposure | | The false hero or villain is exposed |
| 29 | Transfiguration | | The hero is given a new appearance |
| 30 | Punishment | | The villain is punished |
| 31 | Wedding | | The hero marries and ascends the throne – there is a happy ending |

**Table 1 – Propp's narrative functions**

| *Dramatis Persona* | Narrative function | Notes on interpretation and development from Propp (1968) |
|---|---|---|
| Hero | The subject of the story – the one who takes action to resolve the complication, undertakes difficult tasks and achieves a happy ending (wedding). | The hero may be a victim of villainy or lack but then acts to resolve it themselves, unlike the victim. |
| Villain | One who causes harm or material loss – carries out villainy and engages in struggle with the hero and pursuit. | |
| Victim | The subject of villainy or lack – but who does not carry out other hero functions. | Propp characterises the victim as the princess or sought-after person. He also argues that the father and the princess cannot be easily distinguished in terms of fairy tale narrative functions. However, Propp only categorises *dramatis personae* according to the narrative function that ensues; that is, the narrative function is the primary category of analysis. In this research, the narrative roles of different organisational actors are considered as a significant analytical category in itself. |
| Father | One who dispatches the hero to seek or rescue the victim.<br><br>One who sets the hero difficult tasks.<br><br>One who recognises the hero and exposes a false hero. | |
| Donor | One who tests the hero.<br><br>One who provides the hero with a magical agent. | The helper is distinct from the donor who tests the hero and only provides an agent for the hero to use. The helper may help the hero to pass the test or directly intervene themselves. |
| Helper | One who directly helps the hero *e.g.* through spatial transference – helping them to find the victim, villain or sought-after object. | |
| False Hero | One who makes false claims. | |

**Table 2 – Propp's narrative *dramatis personae***

Having established a detailed narrative coding the interview texts were further analysed as instances of self-presentation. This involved firstly categorising the types of stories told, initially using Propp's distinction between tales based on villainy or a lack (table 1), and developing further categorisations to reflect the particular context of contemporary organisations (Dundes, 1968). This used a simplified version of thematic coding (King & Horrocks, 2010). Secondly the interview texts were re-read and analysed in terms of narrative boundaries (Riessman, 2008) in order to determine whether discrete stories or story elements might be read as constructing or contributing to an underlying meta-story (Beech &

Sims, 2007; Hawkins & Saleem, 2012; Riessman, 2008) or overarching theme (King & Horrocks, 2010). That is, the focus of analysis shifted from the content of the story to the purpose and work of the story in its contextual telling (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009; Czarniawska, 2004a). In doing so the researcher's own role is acknowledged in constituting both the narrative which is analysed (Riessman, 2008) and the presented analysis as "artfully created text" (Watson, 1995: 302) which is both the author's construction of her subjects and a construction of herself (van Manen, 1997) as a researcher.

Paradigmatic analysis was undertaken based on identifying the oppositions within the interview text, both in the story itself and the wider text, and the manager's positioning of themselves in relation to such oppositions. In doing so it directly draws on the mythical conceptualisation of narrative set out in sections 2.5 and 2.6 (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983). Analysis followed the method of thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010) set out under stage 1, with interpretative codes capturing the nature of the particular sets of personal oppositions within each manager text, and overarching themes characterising the different ways in which medial managers constructed their organisational worlds.

**Stage 3 – Medial manager organisational positioning**

The third stage of analysis starts to contextualise the self-presentations of medial managers within the research conceptualisation of the medial manager position in the organisation. It is directly informed by the conceptualisation of the medial manager (chapter 3), and the effects of the particular organisational positioning of the medial manager on medial manager identity and identity work. Specifically it utilises the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (section 3.5) as an analytical lens. This stage involved three phases of analysing the medial manager interview texts within the discursive context of the organisation as analysed in stage 1. The first was to identify the possible subject positions available to medial managers at Panorama Housing, and the particular subject positions recognised by individual managers within their interview texts. This uses a variation of King and Horrock's (2010) thematic analysis in which overall categories of subject position – manager, team member, practitioner – were identifiable relatively quickly, and the focus of analysis became identifying the particular and different aspects and nuances of such subject positions. That is, the aim of the analysis here is not to merge codes into a

smaller, higher order, but to open them up and unpack them, albeit still seeking higher levels of abstraction.

The second phase involves analysing the ways in which medial managers responded to the particular subject positions recognised in their texts. That is, in what ways do they manage multiple and potentially competing subject positions? Early on in the analysis the conceptual framework developed by Roccas and Brewer (2002) suggested itself as an analytical tool. Working from a social identity theory perspective, Roccas and Brewer (2002) propose a model to interpret ways in which individuals manage multiple and potentially conflicting identities based on a continuum from simple cognitive schemas based on commonalities between identities, to complex schemas integrating difference. This formed an initially productive framework for looking for, identifying and categorising the responses of medial managers, although the particular responses of medial managers in their particular cultural context lead to some refinement of Roccas and Brewer's original model. However, the model did not prove sufficient to interpret a particular aspect which emerged from the data, namely the ways in which medial managers *contested* certain subject positions, rather than finding different forms of accommodation. Thematic analysis was therefore used to develop a further higher level interpretative set of responses, although this process was also informed by Roccas and Brewer's model, and in particular the concept of expressing responses as a continuum from simple to complex cognitive structures.

The third phase involved analysing the medial manager interview texts in terms of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity developed in section 3.5. In particular its aim was to identify and characterise the range of ways in which managers interpreted their organisational position 'in-between' the organisation and the staff and services they managed. Analysis followed an iterative process in which pre-existing overarching concepts were combined with a form of thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010). As the medial manager texts were read in terms of the conceptualisation of medial manager identity, descriptive codes were developed to capture talk which reflected how medial managers interpreted and made sense of their organisational position and its meaning, with particular attention being paid to the ways and extent to which medial manager talk suggested identifications with different organisational constituents, and the ways and extent to which their

interview talk recognised, interpreted and responded to tensions and conflicts inherent in their organisational position: that is, the dimensions of identification and agency discussed in section 3.5. Within those overall groupings, thematic analysis was applied in order to identify particular facets of each dimension, by analysing the descriptive codes and identifying relationships between them in order to develop interpretative clusters, and by analysing and checking the relationships between the interpretative clusters and the overarching dimensions. This process led to a more precise set of characteristics for each dimension and enabled a more nuanced analysis of medial manager texts against each dimension. This was not a quantitative but an interpretive and iterative process in that not only the extent of coding but the nature and weighting were also considered; and the overall aim was not to identify a set of medial manager 'types', but to interpretatively reflect the range of ways in which medial managers described and made sense of their organisational position and the meaning of their role within the context of their interview talk: that is, different possible ways of being a manager.

**Stage 4 – Medial manager identity and identity work**

The final stage of analysis involved further analysing medial manager interpretations of their organisational positions within the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity in terms of their stories, their construction of a personal social world and their responses to discursive claims, in order to identify key factors which afford and constrain different interpretations of their organisational position. A form of thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010) was undertaken in which the units of analysis were the interpretative and thematic codes already identified as forming significant resources for medial manager identity work, and which enable or constrain the construction of particular medial manager organisational positionings, or 'ways of being a manager' and workplace identities.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter has built on the philosophical foundations and principles established in chapter 4 and provided a detailed description of the research design and methods used to collect and analyse data. It has demonstrated how the design and implementation of methods for both data collection and analysis are informed by the research question and theoretical foundations established in chapters 2 and 3, and

utilised in specific ways to address the particular concerns of the research. In particular, presentation of the analytical strategy has established a clear map which sets out four analytical stages and how they are built upon to develop deeper levels of analysis. The following three chapters return to this map in order to clearly guide the reader through the findings resulting from the research.

# Chapter 6 – Medial manager stories: narrative and paradigmatic analysis

## 6.1 Introduction

The following three chapters present the results of the four stages of analysis presented in section 5.4.2. This chapter presents the results of stages 1 and 2: the organisational and discursive context in which medial managers at Panorama Housing work, and the analysis of medial manager stories as instances of self-presentation. Chapter 7 presents the findings of stage 3, which starts to contextualise the medial manager stories in terms of the research conceptualisation of the medial manager position within the organisation and the identity work undertaken in response to the particular organisational context and position of the medial manager. Chapter 8 presents the findings of stage 4 in which these medial manager interpretations of their positions are analysed in the context of their stories, their construction of a personal social world and their responses to discursive claims in order to identify key factors which afford and constrain different organisational interpretations, positionings and ways of being a manager.

This chapter draws directly on the narrative conceptualisation of identity developed and presented in chapter 2 (figure 1, repeated below). Self-identity – the individual's reflexive understanding at any moment – is understood specifically as narrative self-identity and is expressed as an arrow in order to reflect the ways in which narrative provides an account of the individual's life in terms of unity and purpose and which links the individual's past and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; McAdams, 1985; Ricoeur, 1992; Sims, 2005b, 2008; Watson, 2009). Identity work is similarly a dotted arrow enveloping narrative self-identity, to express the ongoing work of constructing, revising, repairing and maintaining narrative self-identity in the context of identity regulation, in order to maintain a coherent sense of self over time. Finally, identity regulation is presented as multiple circles which express the multiplicity of discursive practices impinging on narrative self-identity over time and space. Drawing on Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) mythical thought, identity work is conceptualised as the ways in which an individual responds to multiple discursive practices of identity regulation by both selectively constructing a social landscape

based on oppositions, and establishing a mediating path through that landscape, through continually "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" narrative self-identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262).

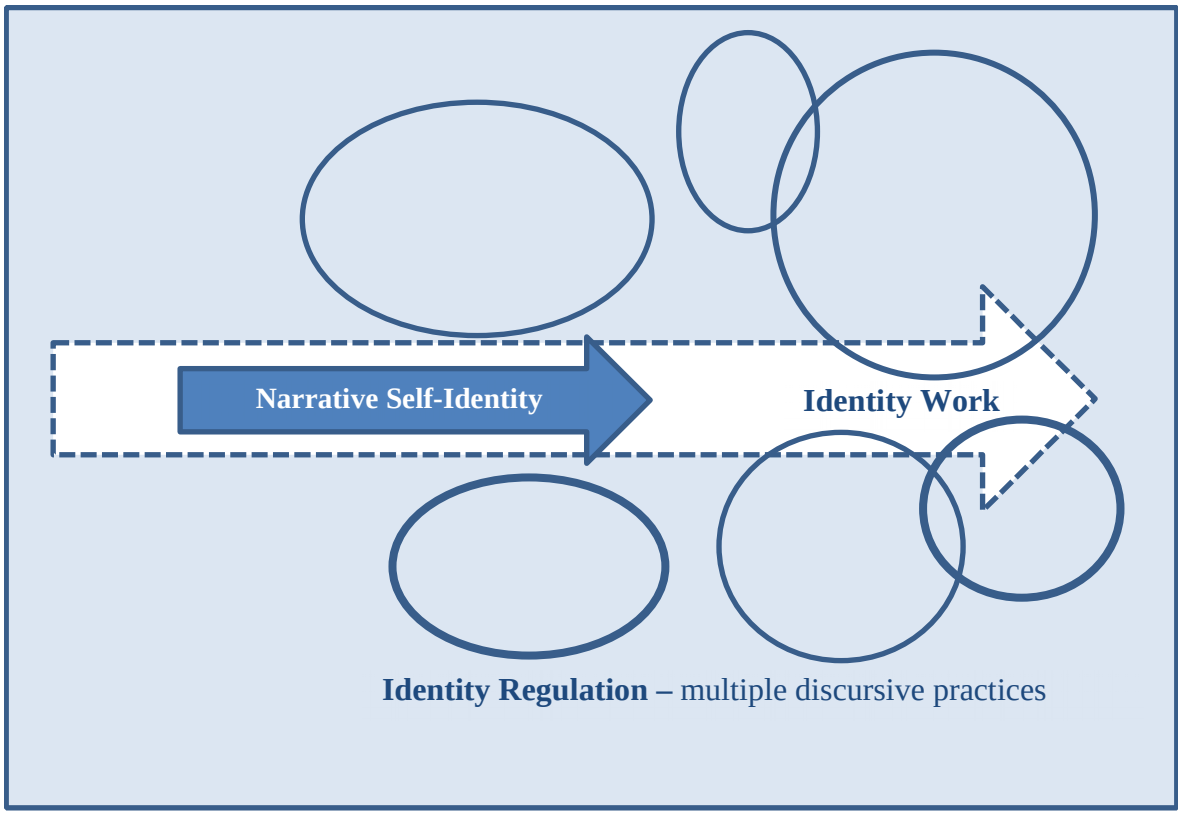


**Figure 1 – a narrative conceptualisation of identity (repeated from section 2.6)**

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section presents the analysis of the organisational discursive context. It therefore identifies significant discursive subjectivities impinging on medial managers within the context of the case organisation, Panorama Housing, and the possible discursive resources available to medial managers. This provides the necessary background both to interpret the workplace context of Panorama managers generally, and to interpret the particular forms of identity work undertaken. The second section analyses the stories told by medial managers about themselves which were elicited during interviews as forms of narrative self-identity or self-presentation through a narrative structural analysis. In the third section the manager texts are analysed paradigmatically in order to explore the particular social and organisational worlds constructed by managers through their stories and the ways in which they position themselves within such social worlds through their self-narratives (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983).

## 6.2 The organisational and discursive context

This section addresses stage 1 of the analytical process set out in chapter 5.4.2:

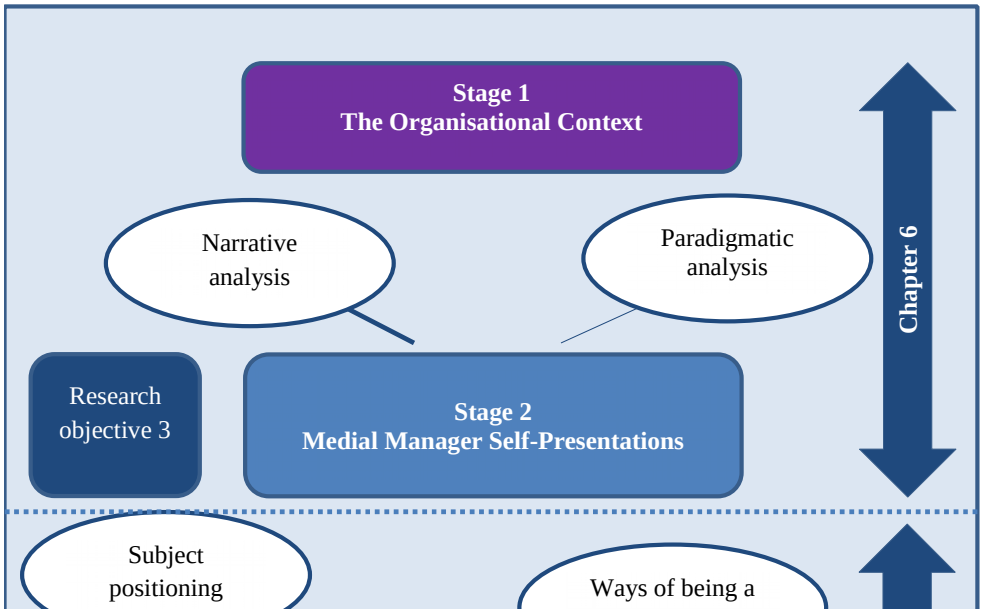


**Figure 5 – Position of analysis of organisational discourses within the analytical process**

The purpose of this section is to present an account of the 'bounded system' (Stake, 1995) of the case study organisation, Panorama Housing. The account draws upon a range of data collected over a fifteen month period which included interviews with the CEO and two executive directors, work-shadowing of individual managers, formal observations of team meetings and other internal and external organisational activities, and the collection of internal and external organisational documents and artefacts (section 5.2). The section has three interconnected aims. First, it aims to describe and characterise the case organisation, and to provide the reader with a flavour of its nature, culture and context. Second, it aims to present an analysis of the discursive work undertaken by the organisation: the kind of organisation it is seeking to be, or to present itself as, and the kind of employees it is seeking to create (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Belova, 2010; C. Casey, 1995). Third, it aims to identify the significant discursive resources and subject positions available to, or impinging upon managers.

### 6.2.1 Panorama Housing

Panorama Housing is a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) or housing association operating in the North West of England. It was formed in 2006 to take over the

housing stock of a local authority, Seeborough Council. Panorama's origins are therefore embedded in Seeborough Council and the public sector, but it has changed significantly and deliberately since 2006. After an initial period of establishing the new organisation and focusing on bringing the housing stock up to the national Decent Homes standard – one of the primary drivers for stock transfer – Panorama embarked on a programme of cultural change. As the CEO explained:

> *Lots of [staff] had never worked for a housing association before, they'd only worked for the local authority and whilst the job that they did in the local authority might have been fine for the local authority it was a different day, we were a different kind of organisation. We would stand or fall based on our own performance*. – CEO, interview

As well as seeking to "change people's thinking, how they thought about themselves, how they thought about the organisation, what they could achieve in the organisation" (CEO, interview) this process also involved a number of restructures, and staff and particularly manager turnover, so that the organisation had "skills and aptitudes and attitudes that we needed" (CEO, interview) Of the twenty one managers interviewed in this study, fourteen joined the organisation after Panorama had been formed, and only three had been in their current post under Seeborough Council.

When interviewed, the CEO identified the key to managing Panorama Housing as establishing a clear organisational identity and vision which was distinct from the old Seeborough Council Housing. There was much evidence of close control over key organisational messages and communications: team meetings all followed the same detailed agenda; staff notice boards and rest rooms carried a rolling programme of key messages such as recent accreditation success and a career support programme; free-standing banners carried a rolling programme of key organisational messages such as 'Dare to be Different'; the organisation's extensive website promotes a wide range of community events and successes as well as detailed quarterly performance updates; and the CEO personally ran workshops with staff in preparation for a staff engagement accreditation. As an organisation, Panorama Housing appears to be deliberately seeking to create and present an organisational identity, with Panorama employees who fit and engage with that organisational identity. The next section

sets out in more detail the nature of that presented organisational identity and some of the other discourses that exist within Panorama.

### 6.2.2 Key organisational discourses

Thematic analysis as described in section 5.4.3 (King & Horrocks, 2010) identified three overarching themes to characterise Panorama's organisational identity: 'being a business', 'being the best' and having a 'shared moral purpose'. Table 3 below summarises these themes and the key discourses derived from interpretative clusters which underpin them. In presenting these overarching themes as dominant organisational discourses it is recognised that this constructs a version of the organisation by the researcher and requires other minor discourses to be necessarily suppressed (Brown, et al., 2005).

#### Being a business

Housing associations such as Panorama Housing represent a particular example of competing values (Oldenhof, et al., 2013) and organisational logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014) in the form of drivers to be both commercially and socially focused, or a 'social business' (Collier, 2005; Gruis & Nieboer, 2004a, 2004b) (see chapter 4.6). Given this tension, and notwithstanding full recognition of its social role and responsibilities discussed below, it is notable that Panorama presents and positions itself explicitly as a business. It actively pursues a commercial business model through the creation of a parent company, Panorama Group, which enables property and central services to function as commercial subsidiaries, and which draws on a "set of corporate principles" through which it aims to achieve "profitable growth" and diversification (Panorama website). However, the language of business also suffuses the content of organisational documents and artefacts. Manager talk both in interviews and in daily observed interactions commonly referred to the organisation as "the business" or "the company", and commercial business terms such as "growing the business", "markets", "sustainability", "saving on long term costs" and "balance sheet" were commonly used not only by managers but by many staff during observed meetings. Managers and staff appeared willing to embrace the concepts of seeking opportunities for business growth, and with using the language of a

| Overarching themes | Key discourses | Illustrative quotes |
|---|---|---|
| Being a business | Commercial business | *"More and more places are paying board members...Also, our turnover last year was £14M, so it's a significant responsibility. We have to compete for the best, most talented, experienced people."* – Manager to tenant scrutiny panel (contemporaneous notes) |
| | Customers | *"[we are] providing excellent services to the paying customer."* – CEO, interview |
| | Financial responsibility | *"It's a question of sustainability. People are "bedblocking" – we've got empty properties we could adapt for such people. It might cost 15k but it saves on the long term costs."*<br>*"But it's hard to evidence what you've <u>saved</u>! There's no methodology for putting it on the balance sheet."* – Staff and manager discussion at a team meeting (contemporaneous notes) |
| | Managers as leaders<br><br>Manager competency | *"Managers are for us the authors of the message, not the simple deliverers of the message and there is a difference."* CEO, interview<br><br>*"[Manager training] is key to us in business but actually quite key to you as an individual and development as well."* – Executive director, interview |
| Be the best | Achievement<br><br>Performance | *"We're doing about 100 to 150 interactions a week – which is <u>really</u> good. But if it continues we'll revise the target upwards...Turnover is over target but we're really keeping pressure on it."* – Manager to team meeting (contemporaneous notes) |
| | Continuous improvement | *"It just seems to be in our DNA to want to improve, to want to get better... We've never been satisfied with standing still."* – CEO to staff (contemporaneous notes) |
| | Different to others | *"We dare to be different"* – Panorama website |
| Shared moral purpose | Social responsibility | *"I don't ever want to think that we didn't do enough. That's why we'll always go the extra mile."* – manager refection following work shadowing, contemporaneous notes<br><br>*"We do what we say we will do"* – Panorama website |
| | Collective engagement | *"We engaged every employee across the organisation in helping us to establish a vision mission and a set of values for the organisation."* – CEO, interview<br><br>*"It's organisational based so we don't have individual targets and we don't even have team targets, it's more a target that <u>everyone</u> can touch on across the whole of the organisation... So it helped develop a self-awareness of what I do, how does that impact on other people across the business, how can I support other people across the business."* – Exec. director 2, interview |

**Table 3 – Summary of the discursive context of Panorama Housing**

commercial business, or at least were prepared to use the common language of the organisation.

Within the general language of business a number of particularly strong discourses were identified. There is a discourse of customers which draws heavily on commercial imperatives: tenants are typically referred to as "customers" and only described as tenants or residents in particular contexts such as documents written in response to regulatory requirements; and services are described as being "customer-centred" and reflecting "customer care" and "customer choice". A second key discourse is one of financial responsibility: Panorama's website makes a particular point of embracing financial efficiency and value for money as "sound business sense". Thirdly there is a strong discourse of managers as key organisational actors in the business. The CEO emphasised the need for managers who had the skills and attitudes to manage in a commercial environment, and how the development and establishment of such managers had been achieved through a number of ways, including organisational re-structuring, enhanced recruitment procedures including the use of day-long assessment centres and implementing a wide-ranging programme of compulsory and optional management training. In particular, managers are seen as the essential means by which the organisation manages communication and key messages. Managers are expected to be "the authors of the message, not simple deliverers" (CEO, interview). Service managers attend monthly forums with all other service managers and directors, and are expected to discuss and debate issues "so rather than just being information forced upon them [sic], once they start getting into those discussions and debates about that information they start owning it" (executive director 2, interview). They are expected to share the organisational vision and are "fundamental to inspiring people to better performance" (CEO, interview).

**Being the best**

Panorama's stated vision is "to be the best". While such aspirations are common in organisational mission statements they are supported in Panorama by several identified discourses. One common discourse is that of continuous improvement, which forms the basis of an established organisational story. Both the CEO and two directors spoke about how Panorama was created from a poorly performing council service – "customer satisfaction was low, staff morale was low, our financial

performance as we came out of the local authority was not where it should be" (CEO, interview) – and moved through becoming a successful organisation by national standards to becoming something unique: "once we'd achieved both of the targets within the first three years it was a case of, well what next - who are we, really" (executive director 1, interview). The organisational story was regularly referenced during formal and informal observations, most explicitly when the CEO introduced a workshop on staff engagement when he reminded staff of where the organisation had come from, what it had achieved and what kind of an organisation that makes it:

> *I don't think we fully understand what we've achieved...It just seems to be in our DNA to want to improve, to want to get better...We've never been satisfied with standing still.* – CEO, contemporaneous notes made from observation

This quote nicely illustrates the potential of the organisational story as a tool for sustaining an organisational culture: the drive to achieve and continuously improve is not externally imposed, but reflects who the organisation and its members are.

'Being the best' is particularly reinforced by a strong focus on performance and achievement. Like all housing associations Panorama is required to measure its performance against a suite of national Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and to agree local KPIs with tenants based on local priorities. However, Panorama's website is striking, compared to other local housing associations, for the amount of performance data it publishes: rather than simply publishing an annual report every KPI is reported on at least quarterly as performance against the organisation's target, performance direction and performance against national and local benchmarks, and accompanied by a narrative explaining reasons for any dips in performance and actions being taken. Given that the majority of social housing tenants are unlikely to be interested in this level of detail, such rigorous public reporting may be interpreted as fulfilling other functions such as reinforcing an internal message that sustaining performance matters, and perhaps as an act of self-presentation to other parties such as government or potential business partners and clients. Performance is also rigorously reported internally. Team meetings all include an agenda item in which performance across all organisational KPIs is presented, not just those which the

team directly contributes to. Service areas have to not only report monthly performance to the executive group but provide an internal narrative on each KPI. The importance of performance is also reinforced through an annual staff bonus if key targets are met across the organisation. Accreditation and achievement also appeared as dominant themes. The wall behind the main public reception is covered in certificates of awards and accreditations and the main board room is similarly decorated. Panorama actively looks for awards and accreditations to apply for, and uses it to reinforce key messages of performance, improvement and 'being the best':

> *We've used the quality accreditations and awards...to engage people across the organisation...and when we've achieved something we've celebrated it, but we've used external accreditations to verify our performance... So in that way employees across the organisation have been engaged in looking at the excellence and quality accreditations, applying them to their own services and thinking, okay, how do we compare and then we've used the results of those to help us focus in and improve.* – CEO, interview

**Shared moral purpose**

A shared moral purpose (or 'doing the best') characterises the second dimension of Panorama's presentation of itself as a business. It incorporates two key themes: a moral dimension of seeking to do the right thing, and a cultural dimension in which staff are positioned as having a collective commitment to the organisation's moral purpose.

Although as a social landlord Panorama is a "social business, with a social purpose and responsibility" (Panorama website) its activities are nevertheless positioned within a wider moral framework. The CEO emphasised when interviewed that building the organisation's reputation and credibility was a key aim. Panorama's website repeatedly refers to the organisation's ethical conduct, for example: "we do what we say we will do" and "doing the right things for the right reasons"; and it explains how the same high standards of conduct and "considerate practice" will apply to partners and contractors as well as to employees. The website also draws on the language of corporate social responsibility to position the organisation as one which goes beyond its core duties. For example, a recurrent phrase is that Panorama's commitment as a landlord is "not just bricks and mortar" i.e. building

and managing properties, but investing in and supporting neighbourhoods and the environment to "help communities grow and thrive". Panorama Housing engages in numerous community investment and philanthropic activities such as funding a major community festival, organising a 'best garden' competition and fundraising for and delivering Christmas hampers to vulnerable tenants. Social responsibility also extends towards HR practices. Panorama offers staff a range of organisational benefits such as flexible working and discounted gym membership, but these are explicitly described on its website as enabling and supporting staff to maintain a work-life balance and healthy lifestyle.

The second dimension of a shared moral purpose is the positioning of staff as collectively sharing in and being committed to the organisation's vision and values. The CEO was explicit in identifying both the importance of engaging staff in the organisation's vision, and the value of the notion of shared responsibility and interdependence in mobilising staff commitment:

> *And there was an element of psychology in a sense of this notion of any organisation only being as good as the people that it employs and one of the things that I said to people was that if that is true then if we're good we're good because you're good. If we're not so good then it raises questions of how good are we as a collective and it's about us as a great big team but it's also about us as individuals, about us working for each other, supporting each other.* – CEO, interview

Both the CEO and directors described an extensive programme of staff consultation and engagement in developing the organisation's vision and values, and ongoing structures to support information sharing and collective responsibility. These include all-team briefings at the start and end of the week in which teams share information about events and planned activities, similar cross-organisational managers meetings, monthly team meetings which include performance updates from across the organisation, annual team away days in which the team or service business plan is finalised with the input of all team members, quarterly meetings between staff representatives and the CEO and an annual staff bonus which is based on organisation-level targets such as attendance and achieving particular KPIs. Panorama has also entered national staff engagement awards for a number of years

and uses these as a way both of identifying and acting on ongoing staff perceptions, needs and expectations, and of reinforcing its key messages.

### 6.2.3 Summary – the discursive context at Panorama Housing

This section has sought to characterise the nature of the organisation and to provide a flavour of its culture and context, particularly through an analysis of the discursive work undertaken by the organisation. It has identified three dominant themes of being a business, comprising key discourses of customers, financial responsibility and managers as professionals and leaders; being the best, comprising discourses of continuous improvement, performance and achievement; and a shared moral purpose, including discourses of social responsibility and collective responsibility. Moreover, the section has highlighted the explicit intention on the part of the CEO and executive directors to promote a clear organisational identity of "who are we, really". Panorama can be seen as engaging in sensebreaking (Pratt, 2000) by emphasising how the old council ways no longer work, and in sensegiving (Pratt, 2000) by representing the organisation as something positive and distinctive, through discursive reference to 'we' and to what it means to be a prototypical member of the organisation (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Costas & Fleming, 2009), and through recruiting employees who are pre-disposed to the organisational values and aims (Brown, et al., 2005). A particular tool in this process has been the organisational story of being created out of something that was failing and becoming something uniquely successful, and which may be seen as helping to create a collective mnemonic (Wertsch, 2013) which a community believes is unique to them.

Nevertheless, despite the efforts of the organisational leadership to construct a strong and coherent organisational identity, there remain potential tensions and ambiguities which may afford discursive and epistemological spaces for organisational actors (Clarke, et al., 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). As a housing association and a 'social business' (section 4.6) Panorama is a hybrid organisation built on multiple and competing institutional logics (Besharov & Smith, 2014) which imply competing values (Oldenhof, et al., 2013) and responsibilities to multiple stakeholders. These can translate into practical tensions and dilemmas for organisational members. For example, there is a potential tension between the organisation's work to deliver social housing based on tenant and community need,

and the requirement to record and report evidence of that work in order to measure performance and demonstrate value for money: more than one manager remarked, during work shadowing, that they regarded performance reporting as "important" but also as "taking us away from the real job". Within Panorama's own ambitions there are also potential tensions, for example between its commitment to employee involvement, engagement and welfare, and its commitment to continuous improvement: what happens if staff are not (always) willing or able to continually improve and develop? In addition to ambiguities created by competing logics, the strength and accessibility of particular discourses promoted within Panorama also creates opportunities for organisational actors to not only privilege one discourse over another, but to use it to counter another. That is, the organisation itself may provide organisational actors with resources and support to construct very personal meanings and interpretations of their organisational roles. The ways in which medial managers at Panorama Housing accept, accommodate, adapt, counter or resist organisational discourses will be further examined in the following chapters and particularly in chapter 7.

## 6.3 Medial manager texts: narrative analysis

This section starts to present the findings of the second stage of analysis; that is, analysis of the medial manager interview texts and the stories they told about themselves, in order to explore and interpret the personal meanings of the manager's organisational role within a personal understanding of their organisational and social world, while recognising the texts as self-presentations within the context of a research interview. It therefore starts to address research objective 3: *to uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles*. This section presents a narrative analysis of the interview texts, following the methods set out in section 5.4.3. Drawing on and iteratively developing the narrative functions and roles identified by Propp (1968) a narrative analysis is applied to both the manager's chosen story(s) and the interview text as a whole, read as narrative, to identify the plot structure of each story, the narrative role(s) adopted by the manager, other narrative roles which feature in the story and the organisational and other actors who populate these roles. Figure 6 summarises the position of narrative analysis within the overall analytical processes.

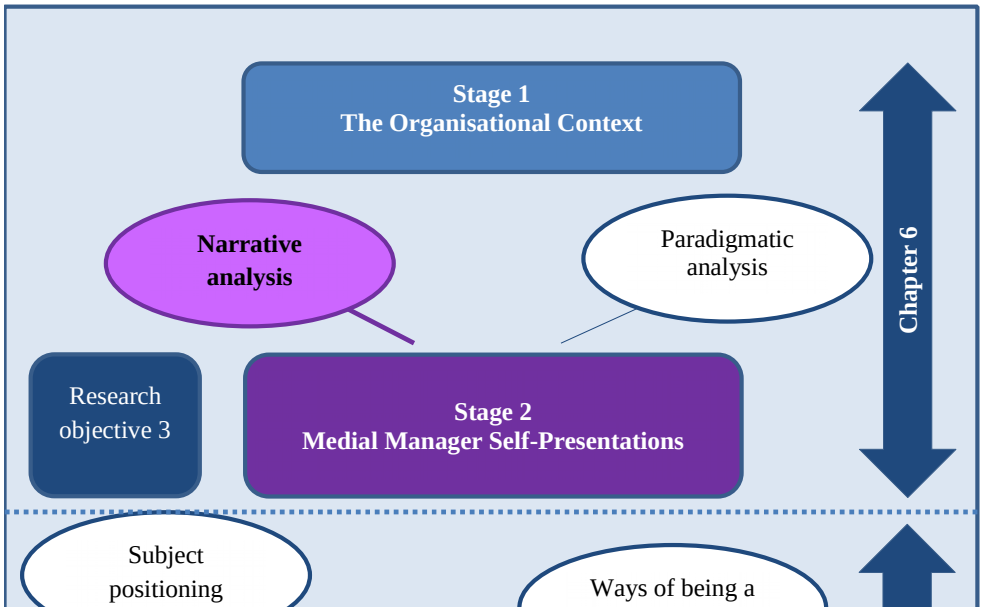


**Figure 6 – Position of narrative analysis in the analytical process**

Twenty one medial managers participated in the research. They represented three hierarchical levels within the organisation: team leaders (N=11), service managers (N=8) and operations directors (N=2). Each manager has been randomly assigned an identifying surname. A summary of participating managers by organisational level is presented in table 4 below.

| Organisational level | Medial managers | |
|---|---|---|
| **Team leader** | Dawson<br>Goddard<br>Irwin<br>Kendall<br>Long<br>Miller | Newton<br>Oakley<br>Potter<br>Varley<br>Woods |
| **Service manager** | Abbott<br>Bailey<br>Chapman<br>Fleming | Hancock<br>Jennings<br>Reed<br>Taylor |
| **Operations director** | Everett | Shaw |

**Table 4 – Medial managers at Panorama Housing**

### 6.3.1 Reading manager stories as subjects

The twenty one managers at Panorama Housing were invited to tell any story of their choosing, which they felt expressed something of the nature and personal meaning of their organisational role. Before going on to a detailed analysis of the stories it is instructive to review the choice of story subjects as expressions of the manager's organisational role. That is, the focus is on the deliberate self-presentations of medial managers rather than analysis of any underlying or meta-stories (which will be further discussed in section 6.3.2). A summary of the chosen stories, with illustrative quotes which characterise the meaning of the story for the manager and/or of the reasons for their choice of story, is presented in table 5 below. It should be noted that certain details have necessarily been omitted from the stories in order to retain the anonymity of participants. Where a distinction is made between the stories initially chosen and told by managers, and any identified meta-story, this is indicated in the table.

The stories chosen by Panorama managers range in scope and scale. They include major strategic and external projects such as leading a change management programme in response to government-driven change or a programme to deliver improvements to customer services; long term internal projects such as reforming or developing a service area; fulfilling organisational tasks such as organising a community event or system configuration; on-going and daily work such as managing the staff rota or assisting customers; extraordinary events such as an emergency flood or stock transfer; managing relationships with staff and managing staff needs and expectations; and stories of personal progress such as promotion and struggle for recognition.

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Abbott**<br><br>Service manager | Integrating a 'lost' team into the organisation<br><br>*Dispatched quest* | Abbott was an experienced manager who was already competent and confident in service delivery, but who faced a new challenge. They were given responsibility for a particular team who had become 'lost': "they didn't feel they were integrated into the rest of the organisation, it's almost like they had their own little culture going on which didn't quite fit in with Panorama" and they were regularly "overlooked" by the organisation. Abbott was directly asked by senior managers to "change things" and Abbott set out to try to re-integrate the team and help them to "sign up to the vision and values". The process was a "real journey" for Abbott, but they were greatly assisted by their team leaders who "really did want it to change" and who were able to support the changes through their strong relationships with the team. The journey was hard and involved challenging behaviours within the team as well as listening to them and finding ways to involve them in organisational activities: "there were times when I used to think, oh god, you know, why have I been given this (laughs) what have I done", but Abbott eventually achieved success. Everyone in the organisation recognises and involves the team and the team themselves are "completely different". | *"When I started in the organisation...there was lots of service delivery work to be done, if you like, that's the way we give our service to customers. So I worked a lot around that, but the actual staff within the team themselves were very motivated and very experienced and driven in what they wanted to do and achieve. So that side of it was quite easy really. When I started to manage the [lost] team, that was a completely different challenge and I think what - it was quite difficult what I had to go through with that team, but I think it's really taught me about how to lead people, and about how to bring people into an organisation and make them feel like they fit."* |
| **Bailey**<br><br>Service manager | Managing a programme to deliver improvements to customers<br><br>*Initiated quest* | Bailey has always been personally committed to helping people in their housing role – "the moment my heart isn't in what I do is the moment I leave" – and particularly to helping the most vulnerable whose needs are not always obvious: "everything isn't black and white". Through their commitment to talking and listening to customers, Bailey became aware that some customers were unable to access services that the organisation was offering. In response they set up a small "task force" to design and implement a series of improvements to improve access, co-ordinated and directed by Bailey ("it's my baby"). The programme was a great success and is now being repeated: "and then obviously this year it's been kind of like ok we did that last year, it was a great success, and try it again this year." | *"...'cause for me there has to be, there has to be meaning behind what I do, and I suppose - There's lots of things we do every day that affect people's lives and they're minute small things that we do...that makes a huge - that has a dramatic effect on how, on someone's health and wellbeing is."* |
| **Chapman**<br><br>Service manager | Transforming their service area through a personal vision<br><br>*Initiated quest* | When Chapman joined Panorama their service area was in a poor state: "far from good", "really downtrodden on by the organisation" and lacking skilled and committed staff. Chapman was given a "blank canvas" and the authority to make whatever changes they needed to improve the service, and Chapman set about developing their own vision both for the service and for the organisation: " it was in my vision, you know, of how are we going to do things." They began by being relentlessly positive – "we're getting better, we're getting better, keep telling them we're getting better" – but improvement was also underpinned by two key strategies of applying for awards and accreditations and using them to demonstrate and promote success, and offering development and promotion opportunities to staff. Chapman's approach to managing and transforming their service area was intensely personal – "I try and tell my team that they're representing me, so if they make a mistake I make a mistake" – and they took personal interest in the work of the team and team members: "I'm enthusiastic and I'm a good motivator, and I just encourage people." Now, not only is the service area successful but Chapman's vision and enthusiasm have influenced the whole organisation by developing a culture of success and staff development. The organisation has now won national awards for its people management "so I think I'm doing something right". | *"The more I've sold it, the more I've said it, the better it makes sense really... [senior managers] just jumped on board....I've always thought that's the best way to do things, and that's what I've just instilled in the business...I've brought that in myself, in my vision, 'cause I think that's the best thing to do."*<br><br>*"So I guess that's what it says about me is, you know, I've sustained my enthusiasm...I think I add, you know, I inspire some people. I definitely add to the happiness of the organisation. So I suppose that if someone said what do you want to be remembered for then it's that, I think I'm good to work with, and that sort of thing."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dawson**<br><br>Team leader | Celebrating the team's successes in helping customers manage problems<br><br>*Battle* | Dawson and their team have long been committed to helping customers resolve problems. They respond both to direct requests for help from customers and to referrals from other Panorama services, and while Dawson's staff deal directly with the customers, Dawson is intimately involved, providing close support and guidance to staff as they manage customer problems, following their progress and celebrating results: "Because it is not just knowing about each other, we tend to know each other's cases... we communicate quite a bit about what we're doing, what issues we're coming up against...how did that go...we're all enthusiastic to know." The team are typically successful in achieving better outcomes for customers, but the continuing challenges facing customers mean that the work goes on. | *"I'm proud of the team and I'm proud of what we try to achieve and that, so in that respect I think...sometimes you can hold your head up high and think...I've done, at least I've tried to help someone, I've done my best for them...And it's been a success story where we are...I think the team all to feel the way we are about things (p) and you know I'm just glad for that."* |
| **Everett**<br><br>Operations director | Co-ordinating a strategic response to legislative changes affecting customers and the organisation<br><br>*Battle* | Both Panorama and many of its customers have been affected by recent legislative changes, and Everett was responsible for co-ordinating the organisational strategic response. The challenge was considerable, with over two thousand customers affected and the threat of significantly reduced rental income, but it was a challenge that Everett embraced because they are committed both to customers and to the organisation. They adopted a hands-on and personal approach throughout, talking to staff and customers themselves to understand their needs, sending staff to collect information from customers and co-ordinating different service areas; and the organisation's response reflects Everett's own personal values of both helping customers in need and ensuring that they meet their responsibilities as tenants. Although the situation is on-going Everett has been successful so far: "as a business we've chaired, I've chaired my way through or we've managed a very <u>difficult</u> challenge which was happening nationally. We've translated that locally, we've worked as a team internally, we've worked as a team across Seeborough." | *"And I picked this because it, it involves a number of facets really that kind of explain <u>me</u>...I like the people side of what I do and so this[change] presented a real challenge in how we help our customers through it...helping them to be independent, helping them to exercise choice but, trying to help them to adjust....and this is kind of the second facet we're a <u>business</u>, so I've got, you know, I'm very business orientated as well...so I'm very <u>interested</u> in how, you know, the business succeeds and very interested how it obviously keeps its income generated."* |
| **Fleming**<br><br>Service manager | ***Chosen story***<br><br>Reforming their service area<br><br>*Battle* | When Fleming took on their service area they were "horrified" at some of the practices that they found. Much of this, they found, was a result of previous managers who had not been able to manage the service effectively and instead pushed down the pressure onto their staff: "they were always waiting for the door to open and for them to fall through, they were always waiting for the rants, they were waiting for the attack". As a result, staff were demotivated and distrustful, and Fleming resolved to improve both the service performance and staff morale. Fleming was able to address performance relatively quickly through making a number of changes to workload distribution, but they soon realised that the key to reducing pressure on staff – as well as performance – was to have a detailed understanding of the service area and be able to give senior managers "confidence", particularly after a difficult early meeting when Fleming was unable to answer senior manager questions satisfactorily. They also had to gain the trust of staff and went about this by being honest and openly admitting any mistakes. Now the service is performing well and Fleming is trusted by both senior managers and staff. | *"When I'd started the role I was horrified to hear sort of some of the practices that were taking place...There was a lot of mistrust. Like I say, people were there not putting a 100% in, they were basically there to get the pay to go home...there was a lot of gossip, a lot of negativity around the team so performance then suffered."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fleming** /continued | ***Meta-story***<br><br>Succeeding as a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Early on in their role Fleming attended their first performance meeting, which went badly. Fleming was surprised at the number of questions they were being asked by senior managers about the service and they were unable to answer them because they did not have the necessary information to hand. Fleming realised that "it wasn't giving the senior managers confidence that I could do the job". They therefore undertook a series of actions in order to fulfil the organisation's expectations of them as a manager, including being able to give detailed narratives and forecasts for their service area and gaining positive feedback from staff. Nevertheless, the journey was bumpy and Fleming had further meetings with senior managers in which they found that they were failing to meet expectations. Now, however, Flaming is cited as the manager who is always prepared, and Fleming themselves has shown resilience and persistence in becoming a successful manager: "it's what you do from that point...do you then break down or do you pick yourself up and shake yourself off and move forward." | *"And I understand that now more than ever, it's something probably I wasn't as acutely aware of in the past, say in other roles but I do understand now. If you know your stuff and if you do your research, you do your background, people have got confidence in you (p) then (pause) it makes life a lot easier. If you bumble about and you, you know, you're not prepared, you don't know your position, you don't know the reasons behind that."* |
| **Goddard**<br><br>Team leader | Becoming a team leader – the 'rise from the shop floor'<br><br>*Personal quest* | Goddard was an experienced officer whose career has mirrored the creation and growth of Panorama: "I've seen it from the beginning". Goddard wanted to "progress my career" and found immediate support from their manager who gave them additional responsibilities and supported their application for promotion. Goddard was successfully promoted, but then faced the challenge of "having to manage people who you were once before". However, Goddard continued to receive support from their manager, including formal management training, and has been able to successfully manage staff through their personal knowledge of the service: "so I know the issues that they face, I know the difficulties, I know the challenges". | *"I see my role being (pause) that I developed from the bottom upwards so, you know, I haven't come into the role that I'm doing now not knowing (pause) about how the everyday (pause) tasks are dealt with of being [an officer] so I know the issues that they face, I know the difficulties, I know the challenges".* |
| **Hancock**<br><br>Service manager | The stock transfer<br><br>*Battle* | Tenants were due to vote on whether to transfer council housing stock in order to create a new housing association. A group opposed to stock transfer of council housing were trying to influence the vote by mis-information, protest, and intimidation, and despite expectations the vote was lost amongst allegations of vote-rigging: "there was dirty dealings". However, tenants came to realise that transfer was the only way in which their homes could be improved, and they began a campaign for a new vote, with Hancock assisting them. Despite further opposition and intimidation the second vote went ahead and was won. | *"We were on target to get the yes vote, and we got a no which was unbelievable...But there was dirty dealings...And then, the vote was overturned, and that for me was the start of real tenant empowerment because they took that decision into their own hands, and then, we came to a housing association in two thousand and six."* |
| | Becoming a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Hancock applied for a management post. Initially they were appointed on a temporary basis. However, Hancock was committed to their service area and to helping customers, and set about applying for a key accreditation that the organisation needed. The service was assessed in detail by auditors, who identified key improvements which Hancock then implemented, convincing the organisation that they had failed to understand a key issue. The organisation successfully gained the accreditation and Hancock "got my proper manager's money." More importantly the service, and the ways in which it helps customers, is now recognised as important by the whole organisation. | *"So I see my role as being almost like a flagship for the organisation, because some of the work that I do, especially the positive work that we do, is easy to publicise...the positive side of the business is what we do with [customers]."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Irwin**<br><br>Team leader | ***Chosen story***<br><br>Responding to an emergency flood<br><br>*Battle* | An emergency flood was reported in a high-rise block, caused by a tenant stealing an immersion heater. Irwin and their team were central to the organisation's response, assessing the situation, contacting and then co-ordinating other services and external agencies: "like a spider's web going out, everyone else doing their own little thing...we were in the centre and it went out to everyone else and they came back to us". Eventually the tenants were safely evacuated and re-housed and the building secured, with Irwin and their team remaining involved throughout the whole incident. | *"Our scope's wider than, I think, everyone else's, I mean I could be wrong but I think they just touch on them, where we're more involved with every agency, plus we're involved with more or less every member of staff as well, within in the building, because there's always someone wants to know or ask a question, you know what I mean, and that's what I like as well."* |
| | ***Meta-story***<br><br>Struggle for recognition as a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Irwin is not recognised as a manager by the organisation, despite the fact that they co-ordinate and manage a service – as evidenced by the story of the emergency flood. Indeed, other team leaders and managers seem to get more recognition despite having less demanding roles: "we go into their job as well where they don't come to ours they just ask questions". During their career Irwin has demonstrated their managerial qualities through changing and developing with the organisation, taking on new responsibilities and developing and implementing new procedures. However, Irwin remains unrecognised as a manager and the story remains unresolved. | *"That's what I can't understand, why we're still called... team leaders - we're managers, we manage a service. And it's not the money, as I said, it'd be great, it's just that we manage the service, we don't just supervise staff, we manage the actual service and I know it's only a title but it's a title that I think is necessary if you're doing the job."* |
| **Jennings**<br><br>Service manager | Growing and promoting their service area<br><br>*Initiated quest* | Jennings joined the organisation as an expert in their field: "I wouldn't say anyone's come from the same sort of background as [me]". However, despite being initially excited about their new role they discovered that the organisation did not really understand their service area or the value it could offer the business, "so I was kind of sat at my desk thinking - what have I come to?" Jennings therefore set about promoting the value of the organisation and seeking out additional resources. By starting to not only achieve successes but promoting them internally, and its contribution to the business, Jennings was able to gain recognition and acknowledgement of their service area, and grow it within the organisation: "I came in thinking this is an undervalued, misunderstood area, and now it feels like there is real backing." | *"[It] kind of <u>really</u> encouraged me that actually the tables had really turned from – just go and sit in a corner and we're not really sure what you do and we're not really bothered, to actually we believe in [your service area] and here's [more resources] because we believe that you'll do the right thing...and you'll get the outcomes."* |
| **Kendall**<br><br>Team leader | Developing a new internal system<br><br>*Dispatched quest* | Panorama had identified that they needed a new internal system and Kendall was asked to join a team who would be dedicated to learning, configuring and implementing it. Kendall attended an extensive training course and then spent many months working on the system. Initially they felt out of their depth, but other colleagues on the team reminded them that they were bringing their operational expertise on which the group were heavily reliant: "I felt out of my depth in configuring these systems I suppose, but once I'd learned how to do them, once I was trained how to do them then I could bring all my kind of other skills in to what I was doing if you like". The eventual implementation and roll-out was a success, but Kendall then found themselves underutilised in managing the system: "I said you're paying me an awful lot of money to sit in a room and do filing, you know". Eventually Kendall was able to secure a position that fully reflected their skills and knowledge. | *"I found it interesting and I found it <u>different</u> to what I had been doing. Again, it was something I was kind of quite proud of but I suppose the <u>main</u> thing - I mean one of the things that you talked is - which you feel represents what your <u>role</u> means to <u>you</u>. Rather than what my role means, I suppose it's more what <u>I</u> can do for the business, as opposed to what my role means. <u>I</u> don't care what my role is, what I'm <u>called</u>, as long as I'm providing something that the business needs."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Long**<br><br>Team leader | Gaining an accreditation for the service area<br><br>*Dispatched quest* | The organisation had asked all service areas to identify and apply for relevant accreditations. The managers within Long's service area identified one particular accreditation, and Long was given responsibility for project managing one part of the service. Although there were easier ways to gain the accreditation Long chose a more challenging area: "these weren't the cushiest areas". Long worked with their team to prepare for the accreditation, and then underwent an extensive assessment by internal auditors who interviewed Long's staff, customers and external agencies about the service area. Their award of the accreditation was an important verification not only of Long's project management, but also their management of the service: "Because it is easy for me to sit here and say yeah we're doing a fantastic job... but then for the independent assessors to actually go and talk to [customers], and talk to external bodies, and for them to feed that back is excellent I think." | *"I think what I liked about it was that...it could have been quite easily somebody higher who project managed it and ran with it, and I could have just been a player in that, but (pause) right from the outset they said, no, you do it, you project manage it, you know, you're the [one] with the [ ] knowledge, you do it. So yeah, so initially there was a bit of apprehension from myself, having never done anything like that before (pause) but to actually have project managed it and come out with the [accreditation], yeah, I think is excellent."* |
| **Miller**<br><br>Team leader | Struggling to gain financial recognition<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Miller joined the organisation with considerable previous experience in their service area. However, despite their experience they were appointed at the bottom of their salary scale. Miller unsuccessfully tried to argue that they should be moved up the salary scale to reflect both their previous experience and current performance. Eventually Miller was able to resolve the situation by applying for a different and better paid post within the organisation, which they now feel is a fair reflection of their skills and experience. | *"I saw other people [being paid] more than me for doing the same role. But I believe I was getting more output than those people, you know, providing more output... I wasn't asking for a vast amount of money, I was just asking to be at the top end of the scale. But at the time I was told like, no, you have to come in at the entry level, which I thought was a bit old fashioned."* |
| | Defending the team against unreasonable expectations<br><br>*Battle* | Some senior managers treat Miller's team unfairly by criticising them without having all the facts available. They also expect Miller's team to work in difficult community situations which are more challenging than senior managers realise, because of their distance from the community itself. Miller regularly defends the actions of staff but senior managers do not apologise even when they have been shown to be wrong. Miller also supports staff to do their difficult job, drawing on their own operational experience, but keeps their personal views of the sometimes unrealistic expectations of the organisation to themselves. | *"Expectations are kind of high (pause) and the environment, it's (pause) it's - I won't say it's overlooked but the environment - this environment in this building and employee wellbeing (pause) the kind of modernity and comfort of this building is a massive contrast with a lot of the work that we have to do."* |
| **Newton**<br><br>Team leader | Organising a community event<br><br>*Initiated quest (for self)*<br>*Dispatched quest (for staff by Newton)* | Certain customers have particular needs which the organisation is not sufficiently aware of, but Newton's personal experience and expertise gives them additional insight. Newton took advantage of being asked to lead the delivery of a community event to create the opportunity for staff and customers to talk to each other and for staff to find out exactly how customers perceived and experienced services, and whether they matched their actual needs and expectations. Newton lead on the organisation of the event, but during the event itself they took a backseat role and acted as facilitator to staff, encouraging them to engage with customers and their individual needs, and to reflect on how they could embody the organisation's own values in their work with customers: "it's about personalising...If you think what the principle means, you think well how can I put that into practise... you want to try and give them an understanding of the true value of what they do". | "It's a chance to interact with customers, it's a chance to serve customers, it's a chance to hear what they like or don't like about the organisation, and it's very much that interface of what outcomes we think we're offering them, and the difference in between their perception of what they are receiving and whether there is any match between what we're offering and what we say we can do... is there a difference between that and what their experience is, and they actually want." |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Oakley**<br><br>Team leader | ***Chosen story (1)***<br><br>Involving staff in a marketing project<br><br>*Dispatched quest* | Oakley's service area was asked to produce materials and a presentation to market their service and its contribution to customers and the business. Oakley volunteered to lead the project. The challenge was to deliver a high quality outcome while also involving all team members – "it seems like an easy task but I was working with a group of people, some had never presented before" – and Oakley worked closely with their team to identify roles which every member was suited to and was able to fulfil. The presentation was a success and the materials were commended by other managers. | *"I mean there's so many skills you need to be a team leader... But for me...you've got to be able to have people on your side... I think the skill is, you try to get the best for the staff, you try to get the best out of the staff but also at the same time make sure the business objectives are met, as well."* |
| | ***Chosen story (2)***<br><br>Supporting staff through an organisational restructure<br><br>*Battle* | The organisation was facing funding cuts, and Oakley's service was to be restructured. Oakley had to manage the process of identifying which service could be cut or reduced, and also had to provide support to staff who were at risk of redundancy: "we're the first point of contact, and as soon as you see them they're firing questions at you". The restructure went on for several months and proved to be difficult at times, particularly as some staff saw Oakley as "management" rather than team leaders who had been working closely with them. However, after the final decisions had been made, Oakley was able to look back on it as a learning experience: "I think it was quite challenging <u>but</u> you learn from these things don't you as well, I'm still here, (laughs) I've survived the process. And you do learn." | *"The change management thing, I thought that would be a good one to share with you because it was something that is you know it's in management books and everything isn't it, you get the theories and everything about people and going through these things - well I'd love to hear it from someone from first-hand about what - how I feel, but also the positive side about what I've learned from the process as well."* |
| | ***Meta-story***<br><br>Becoming a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Oakley was appointed to a team leader role which included managing a service they had little previous experience of. This meant that in spite of staff expectations that they will provide expert support and knowledge, "because I'm still learning on the job (p) I don't always have the right answers" and Oakley had to work hard to build up trust with the team. As well as continuing to learn about the new service, Oakley also worked at developing their management skills, including volunteering for formal manager training that the organisation was offering: "it's a great opportunity, it really is...this is another string to my bow". Oakley has been able to begin to recognise themselves as a manager, not only in undertaking such training, but in demonstrating manager skills as evidenced in their chosen stories, and now has ambitions to progress to a senior management role. | *"We're all doing the CMI at the moment, which the organisation is paying for and supporting, which is great...I think, I did my degree late, only a few years ago, and this is another (p) string to my bow I suppose because it - having the qualifications does help. I know (p) experience is, is important as well but I think if you've got the balance it does help."* |
| **Potter**<br><br>Team leader | Becoming a team leader and re-negotiating relationships<br><br>*Personal quest* | Potter had previously been a team leader in another organisation, and this encouraged them to apply when a vacant team leader post came up in their own team. Potter was successful but immediately realised that this meant they needed to re-negotiate their relationships with their team: "you're re-establishing your position again". For Potter, the story is one of a journey they made with their team: "It was about us all going on this journey where they were getting used to me, I was being - they were seeing me in a different light, I was their leader". They began by meeting with the team and directly addressing the subject: how they were now in a new role, and would be responsible for enforcing organisational standards irrespective of friendships, but how their interest and concern for the team remained: "They knew that I got to where I wanted to be because I was bothered about them." Potter also regularly asked the team what they wanted from them as team leader, and how they could best support them in their jobs. Potter has successfully managed their transition and established a new relationship with the team: "it's about mutual respect really, I respect them, and they respect me." | *"So it was about us all, sort of, going on this journey where they were getting used to me (pause) I was being - they were seeing me in a different light, I was their leader so I was now the one, you know, possibly delivering (pause) hard messages in my one-to-ones and things, and managing performance... I've tried to take the team on the journey with me, rather than being, well I've got where I want to be now, I'm not bothered about anybody else. They knew that I got to where I wanted to be because I was bothered about them.* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Reed**<br><br>Team leader | ***Chosen story***<br><br>Organising a community event<br><br>*Difficult task – part of:*<br><br>***Meta-story***<br><br>Becoming a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Reed volunteered to organise a significant community event on behalf of the organisation. This involved co-ordinating other internal services and external partners, but also being responsible for multiple practical arrangements: "so many things that I did not even realise that were involved in putting something like [this] on - the little things that you forget and they just like take up your time". The event was a success and Reed's involvement in it is important to them, because it showcases the organisation to the community and its customers and demonstrates Reed's commitment to the organisational values and their managerial abilities.<br><br>When Reed was appointed as a manager they were aware that they did not have the specialist knowledge of many of the staff they were managing: "I kind of think my first few months I was a bit like, oh my god, you know, what am I doing, it's a massive difference". However, Reed gains considerable support from their own line manager and models themselves and their management style on them, for example in remembering to consider the wider implications of decisions and not being "tunnel-visioned". Reed also gained self-recognition as a manager through their successful delivery of the community event and through starting to see themselves as a representative of the organisation who embodies its values, rather than as a specialist. Rather than providing specialist expertise, Reed now promotes the team's work to the organisation and helps the team understand organisational objectives and priorities: "I just kind of look at it as a as a business perspective, you know, what are the outcomes going to be, why would we do this, how would it impact on the business, how will they impact on the team, how will they impact on the customer". | *"I see that event as kind of the epitome of what our team is in the organisation, so it's giving something back, to our customers, really, but also doing it in a way that we can showcase some of the work that we do that can help them showcase some of the local agencies and support services that are out there for them."*<br><br>*"We get a budget of £X,000 which is a lot of money to be held respo – to be like responsible for so, you know, I want to make sure that it is spent wisely and spent correctly and we're getting the right things in and the right people there and, you know, none of it's getting wasted, and, you know, value for money and things like that which is one of the key things within this organisation that, you know, we always aim to, to work towards."* |
| **Shaw**<br><br>Operations director | Helping two managers to work together<br><br>*Existential struggle* (of others) | Two managers under Shaw were increasingly finding it difficult to work together and were starting to inadvertently undermine each other. Shaw became aware of the situation and brought the two managers together at a meeting. As well as warning them of the possible consequences of the situation continuing, Shaw also acted as a mediator between them, helping them to share their different perspectives and supporting them to find practical solutions. Both managers recognised that they needed to respect each other's role as managers, while Shaw realised that the organisation could also better support recognition of each manager. This has led to Shaw becoming a lot more "involved" in the management of the service area than they would expect to be, but "I began to see that things were changing, and the staff [ ] seemed to be responding differently, and I think it's made a really big difference." | *"Ok. I picked this - I thought about a couple of things to talk about really, but I wanted to pick something that was relatively fresh and that was still ongoing and developing really. So the incident I'm going to give you is of a member of staff that I manage...two members of staff...and how I managed and helped them manage [a difficult] situation."* |
| | Defending a team to executive directors<br><br>*Battle* | A team within Shaw's service area were already feeling "downtrodden" and unrecognised by the organisation. Following an extensive project, it was identified that procedures had not always been followed correctly. The team were being accused of being at fault by other managers, and so Shaw talked to them to establish the facts. At a later meeting between the team and senior managers the team were subjected to a "kind of vicious attack" by one senior manager. Armed with the facts, Shaw was able to defend the team and show how the fault actually lay elsewhere. The meeting was memorable for the staff because "I don't think anyone had ever stood up for them before. I don't think that - particularly in front of senior directors". | *"This is a story I thought about saying here but it was quite old so I didn't... it's like stuff of legend now, that meeting! (laughs) But I think that was for them that was a real turning point. So my relationship, rather fortuitously really, because of that meeting, my relationship with a lot of the front line staff, um, has been positive from the start, because of that."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Taylor**<br><br>Service manager | Reforming the service area<br><br>*Battle* | One of Taylor's teams felt unrecognised and undervalued by the organisation: they were the "fall guys" for anything that other teams did not pick up and were "bridesmaids of the organisation, rather than the bride, so to speak". Taylor recognised how and why the team felt as they did and began to address the problem in two ways. Firstly they actively promoted the value of the team's work within the team and reminded them that taking on multiple tasks reflected a holistic concern for the customer. But secondly they addressed how the organisation had failed to recognise the team and set out to "bat for them at my level". This included ensuring that the team could access all organisational facilities; celebrating performance success and accreditations; ensuring they were invited to external award ceremonies; and arguing that some performance indicators were not a true reflection of the value of the team's work. The team now feel fully part of the organisation and are recognised by others as "going the extra mile". | *"The team had a bad reputation, or, the perception of the team was that it had a bad reputation and...they felt they were the fall guys for anything that...could not be designated as somebody's job role...And it was about, I suppose for me, to put an arm round them, and to sort of bat for them at my level with my peers...and to get some...recognition, I suppose, for the important role that we do play."* |
| **Varley**<br><br>Team leader | ***Chosen story (1)***<br><br>Recruiting an inexperienced candidate<br><br>*Personal quest* (of another) | Varley was a member of a recruitment panel appointing a post within their team. One candidate was very young and inexperienced, but nevertheless performed very strongly in the interview. Varley argued their case, pointing out that they had evidently researched the position as well as demonstrating knowledge and aptitude, and convinced the more senior managers to appoint them: "at the end of the day when push comes to shove it was, right well you've got to manage them, it's um, on your head be it." The applicant has since continued to flourish in their new role, vindicating Varley's judgement. | *"I'm proud particularly of the fact that I stood up for that person, argued their case and when it was a marginal decision as to who was going to be appointed, you know I had the guts to basically argue the case for that person."* |
| | ***Chosen story (2)***<br><br>Helping a sick member of staff<br><br>*Battle* | Varley received a call from a staff member who was at home and evidently very ill. Varley went to the staff member's home and realised that they needed to go to hospital. Varley had to decide whether to prioritise their work responsibilities or stay with the team member, and decided to take them to hospital themselves; they since learned that the team member was so ill that they could have died. | *"You turn up to somebody's door and their eyes are yellow and everything's going mad, what do you do, walk away and there's nobody else to help. But once again that is kind of doing the right thing (p) and being true to yourself, isn't it really I suppose."* |
| | ***Meta-story***<br><br>Defending the team against management decisions<br><br>*Battle* | Varley told a number of shorter stories and story fragments about defending the team from decisions by senior managers which were made in ignorance of operational needs and realities. For example, a decision was made to change a system which would undermine the team's work processes and the efficiencies they had already implemented: "nobody's considered that, nobody's talked to us about that". Although Varley is selective in choosing which issues to take up "'cause I can't fight every individual thing" they nevertheless present themselves as having an ongoing responsibility to act on behalf of their team to address problems and concerns, and to act in the interests of their team and the service against such decisions. | *"I tend to try, with the one-to-ones, collate the information the best I can so that I get, you know, a strong impression from the team as to, you know, where I'm going to take the fight, ha. 'Cause I can't fight every individual thing because the chain of command goes up quite a way, so I'll pick the key issues that are affecting people and, you know, I'll concentrate on trying to move them."* |

| Manager | Chosen story(s) and categorisation | Story summary | The meaning of the story for the manager |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Woods**<br><br>Team leader | ***Chosen story***<br><br>Managing the staff rota<br><br>*Difficult task – part of*<br><br>***Meta-story***<br><br>Becoming a manager<br><br>*Existential struggle* | Woods told a series of stories and story fragments illustrating the challenges of managing the staff rota, and being able to balance staff needs with ensuring a full service at all times: for example the staff member who had stress at home; the staff member who needed to take twenty minutes to pick up their child; the staff member who had inadvertently used up all their leave.<br><br>Woods was aware, when they were appointed as a manager, that they were inexperienced. They were particularly concerned not to let down their own line manager who had appointed them and "put their faith in me". Woods' focus on managing the staff rota demonstrates how they have been able to loyally achieve organisational objectives, whilst still reflecting the particular needs and nature of their team and service. Woods can see how they are increasing in competence and experience over time: "now as I'm getting experienced at it, climbing on the bike you're sort of like, yeah, yeah I'm going to do that, yeah, yeah-yeah". | *"It's like playing chess, it's like you've got to move things about to get the result you need...like for instance the other day, a [staff member] needs the holiday...if [they] didn't get the holiday [they] would have had to go on the sick, quite simply."*<br><br>*"And that's what I was worried about because I didn't want to <u>let</u> [my manager] down because [they]'d put [their] faith in me giving me the job, because when [they] give me the job I thanked [them], obviously, and I said I won't let you down. And I wouldn't let [them] down."* |

**Table 5 – Summary of medial manager stories /continued**

Although the span of responsibility of different organisational levels determines the possible scope of stories available to managers (Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001), it is notable that organisational level does not in fact determine the choice of stories which managers felt reflected and expressed the nature and meaning of their organisational role. Both Everett and Shaw, the operations directors, talked about their roles involving a balance between strategic oversight and occasions of getting involved in operational issues. However, Everett's chosen story of managing a change programme privileges the role of strategic oversight, while Shaw's two stories both focus on specific operational issues and managing individual relationships. At the service manager level, Chapman, Fleming, Jennings, Hancock and Taylor all told stories of reforming and developing their service areas – with a particular focus on driving up performance – while Abbott focused on developing relationships with a particular team within their service area, and Bailey and Reed chose stories with an external focus of delivering service improvements to customers and community events. Finally, some team leaders told stories which privilege their relationships with the staff that they manage, such as negotiating new relationships following a promotion (Goddard, Potter) or responding to staff needs and expectations (Miller, Varley, Woods) while other stories privilege delivering services and fulfilling organisational tasks (Dawson, Irwin, Kendall, Long, Newton, Oakley) . The purpose of this observation is not so much to highlight the unsurprising diversity of managerial roles and the functions that they are required to fulfil, but that, given the choice, managers chose to focus on different roles when describing themselves and their personal role meanings. Subsequent analysis and discussion will further explore and elaborate the individual manager constructions of, and responses to their organisational roles, and the different forms of identity work undertaken as self-presentations within the context of a research interview.

### 6.3.2 Reading manager stories as plot

This section presents a more detailed analysis of managers' chosen stories and of meta-stories (Beech & Sims, 2007; Hawkins & Saleem, 2012) identified through a narrative reading of the interview text (Riessman, 2008) as set out in section 5.4.3. Propp proposes a basic plot categorisation based on two types of narrative 'complication': of 'villainy' against the hero or victim, or a 'lack' in which something is missing or desired and must be sought after (Propp, 1968) (see table 1,

section 5.4.3). However, Propp also identifies a further form of plot, or 'second move' in which the hero is unrecognised and has to prove themselves. Following initial analysis and categorisation of manager stories, a more detailed typology of plot has been developed based on the coded content of the stories. This typology is summarised in table 6. Essential narrative functions for each plot type are highlighted in bold; those in italics represent possible narrative functions within that plot. An example of coding a manager story is presented in figure 7.

**Quest**

A quest is based on the narrative complication of lack and features a literal or metaphorical departure in search of what is lacking. It is resolved through liquidation of the initial lack. A number of managers told stories that may be categorised as quests, and these stories may be further delineated as distinct forms.

Personal quests are a response to a personal lack. For example, Goddard chose to tell the story of how they were promoted to their current team leader role from within the team and how they have built on their experience in order to progress: "I developed from the bottom upwards so, you know, I haven't come into the role that I'm doing now not knowing". Goddard's story includes help from their manager in building up their experience and competency prior to their promotion, the challenge of "having to manage people you <u>were</u> once before" and the availability of a management training course. Goddard's story ends with a sense of completion – a liquidation of the initial lack – having established themselves in their new role and established a new working relationship with the team. Potter similarly chose a story of promotion and the re-negotiation of relationships with their team afterwards. Varley also told a story of a personal quest, but theirs was the story of the quest of a young and inexperienced staff member who was applying for a new role; Varley themselves sat on the interviewing panel and persuaded the other panel members that the staff member had shown themselves worthy to be taken on despite their lack of experience.

| Plot type | Description | Narrative functions (Propp, 1968) | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Quest | Response to a lack<br><br>Literal or metaphoric 'going out' in search of what is lacking | *0 – The initial situation*<br>*1 – Absentation*<br>*2 – Interdiction*<br>*3 – Violation*<br>**8a – Lack**<br>***9 – Mediation or Connective incident***<br>***10 – Beginning counteraction***<br>**11 – Departure**<br>*12 – The Donor*<br>*13 – The hero's reaction*<br>*14 – Acquisition of a Magical Agent*<br>*15 – Spatial Transference*<br>**19 Liquidation of the Lack** | **Personal quest** – response to a personal lack e.g. seeking betterment, promotion.<br><br>**Dispatched quest** – response to a lack in others. The hero is dispatched by another. Function 9 and 10 will be present to signify the agreement to undertake the quest for another.<br><br>**Initiated quest** – response to a lack in others. The hero initiates action themselves. |
| 2. Battle | Response to villainy<br><br>The victim suffers harm or misfortune – a loss from a previous state | *0 – The initial situation*<br>*1 – Absentation*<br>*2 – Interdiction*<br>*3 – Violation*<br>*4 – Reconnaissance*<br>*5 – Delivery*<br>*6 – Trickery*<br>*7 – Complicity*<br>**8 – Villainy**<br>*9 – Mediation or Connective incident*<br>*10 – Beginning counteraction*<br>*11 – Departure*<br>*12 – The Donor*<br>*13 – The hero's reaction*<br>*14 – Acquisition of a Magical Agent*<br>*15 – Spatial Transference*<br>**16 – Struggle**<br>*17 – Branding*<br>**18 – Victory**<br>*20 – Return*<br>*21 – Pursuit*<br>*22 – Rescue* | |
| 3. Existential Struggle | The second move<br><br>The hero is initially unrecognised and has to prove their true identity or their qualities | **23 – Unrecognised arrival**<br>*24 – Unfounded claims*<br>*25 – Difficult task*<br>*26 – Solution*<br>*27 – Recognition*<br>*28 – Exposure*<br>*29 – Transfiguration*<br>*30 – Punishment*<br>*31 – Wedding* | |

**Table 6 – Typology of plotlines of medial manager stories**

**Goddard's story – Becoming a team leader**

| Description | Illustrative quote | Narrative function |
|---|---|---|
| Establishing their experience as an officer | *When I joined...it was very small. I've seen it from the beginning.* | 0 – Initial situation |
| Desire for promotion | *I wanted to progress my career...* | 8a Lack |
| Goddard's manager is supportive. | *My manager was very supportive...trying to build up my knowledge and encourage me to apply for the position.* | 9 Mediation |
| Goddard is promoted (leaving their old role) and faces initial challenges. | *you're having to manage people who you <u>were</u> once before* | 11 Departure |
| They receive personal support from their manager and is given formal training to support their transition. | *[My manager] would, you know, help me with any queries I had. [They] arranged for me to go on, erm, a Team Leader training course as well ...so we've had kinds of formal type training as well as (pause) assistance every day.* | 15 Spatial transference, guidance |
| Goddard has established themselves in their new role and established new working relationships. | *And now (pause) in terms of the story it's, it's just the everyday management of (pause) the [service area] and supporting the [officers], you know, whether it's personal issues or (pause) things to do with work.* | 19 Liquidation of the initial lack |

**Figure 7 – Example of coding a plotline**

A second form of quest concerns a lack in another. These may be further distinguished as 'dispatched' and 'initiated' quests. In dispatched quests the manager is 'dispatched' by another to fulfil the lack. For example, Abbott was asked to integrate a particular team: "It was, you know, an <u>ask</u> of me...to start to change things and make it different...the organisation <u>knew</u> that this particular set of people needed to be more integrated" (Abbott, service manager). Similarly, the stories of Kendall, Long and Oakley all made clear reference to their success in responding to organisational need and explicit organisational requests of them: "it is a positive thing isn't it, it's a task that I've been asked to do and I've done it" (Oakley, team leader). In initiated quests the manager recognises and responds to the lack themselves. This is not to say that the manager acts unilaterally but that, in contrast to a focus on answering an organisational request, the manager presents themselves as acting and responding without any reference to organisational direction. For example, the stories of Bailey, Jennings and Newton all present them as being driven

by their own experience and expertise, identifying what customers or the organisation need and then acting in response to that need. When Chapman tells their story of reforming their service area they present themselves as acting to implement their own vision and to persuade the organisation of that vision:

> *The more I've said it - the more I've sold it, the more I've said it, the better it makes sense really... So it's always - they just jumped on board. None of them's ever said, no that's not the way you should run the business... That's – I've brought that in myself, in my vision, 'cause I think that's the best thing to do.* – Chapman, service manager

**Battle**

A battle is based on the narrative complication of villainy. Villainy is distinguished from lack because the victim has suffered harm or misfortune to reduce them from a previous state, whereas lack indicates a desire to gain or improve something. Based on this interpretation, villainy in manager stories can be read in a number of ways. Villainy may directly involve a villain. For example, Fleming, Shaw, and Taylor tell stories which feature the actions or lasting effects of former senior managers. Fleming constructs their task of reforming their service area in terms of repairing the effects of previous managers:

> *I mean in the past...it was effectively just a big downward pressure so [senior managers] talk to the managers, the managers come into the room, 'What the effin' 'ell are you doing, why aren't we doing this, what's going on'... [staff] were always waiting for the door to open and for them to fall through, they were always waiting for the rants, they were waiting for the attack.* – Fleming, service manager

Fleming's story is therefore read as a battle against the effects of villainy rather than as a quest to address a lack (for example, of performance, although that was also a consequence of the villainy.) Miller and Varley both told stories in which they undertake "battles" (Varley) against existing managers who are either ignorant of the effect their decisions can have on staff and operations, or who blame staff without knowing all the facts. For Miller this also includes the recognition that the organisation's expectations of staff are not always realistic or achievable. Other embodiments of villainy include a tenant who stole an immersion heater and caused

a flood (Irwin) and campaigners against stock transfer who engaged in “dirty dealings” (Hancock). Villainy may also be indirect, such as the negative effects of external events such as funding reductions (Oakley) or the effects of government legislation on customers and the organisation (Dawson, Everett); or read metaphorically, such as Varley’s story of a staff member who was struck down by serious illness.

**Existential Struggle**

A final type of plot is existential struggle, or the struggle for recognition. This is based on what Propp (1968) categorises as a ‘second move’ which follows the initial complication and resolution of lack or villainy, and in which the hero finds themselves unrecognised and having to prove their worth, often through the completion of ‘difficult tasks’. Existential struggle took a number of forms within manager texts. Hancock and Miller directly chose stories in which they struggled to gain full recognition for themselves commensurate with their experience and position. Reed and Woods both told stories (organising a community event and managing the staff rota) for which it was initially difficult to find a recognisable plotline. However, reading these accounts as difficult tasks led them to be interpreted not as discrete stories but as contributing to a wider meta-story of becoming a manager through a demonstration of their managerial qualities. Thirdly, Fleming, Irwin and Oakley all told stories which could be read as discrete plots, but which, when read as a narrative whole, formed a wider meta-narrative of struggling for organisational recognition. For example, Oakley talked about the challenge of managing a new team whose work they had little prior experience of. In response to this, Oakley’s text presents them as seeking to construct a new managerial identity in which technical expertise is supported and supplemented by wider managerial skills. Oakley explained that they deliberately chose their two stories about marketing the service and managing an organisational restructure to demonstrate what they saw as their key qualities as a manager: “So obviously you’ve got the practical side but also the other side...they’re management skills aren’t they, change management’s one of them and then the other thing was the team work and that stuff.”

**Summary – reading manager stories as plot**

Reading manager stories in terms of plot offers a means of gaining rich insights into the personal experiences of managers, and personal meanings of management. Analysing the plot of manager stories draws attention to certain particular meanings and functions that managers chose to privilege when presenting themselves. Manager stories of their own personal quest or existential struggle construct the manager role as a state of 'being' or 'becoming' rather than 'doing': in such stories managers are engaging with and reflecting on the meaning of organisational roles and what it means to fulfil them. In particular, such stories draw attention to the role of other organisational actors in recognising the manager and their capabilities, and this will be further explored in the next section. However, whereas personal quests construct the manager's current role as the successful fulfilment of a lack, and privilege the process of 'becoming' a manager, existential struggles reveal the potential tensions between organisational actors' understanding of managerial roles, and the sometime struggle to 'be': that is, the struggle to reconcile personal understanding and role meaning with those of others. For example, managers such as Fleming, Oakley, Reed and Wood described processes of coming to an understanding of themselves as managers which also aligned with and met organisational expectations of being a manager; while Hancock, Irwin and Miller described facing a direct challenge to their own understanding of their role and capabilities by lack of organisational verification. Dispatched and initiated quests both privilege the role of the manager as 'doing' or acting on others to achieve goals, but also suggest differences in manager self-construction. Dispatched quests position the manager as a loyal and capable servant of the organisation who is able to fulfil its demands, and it has been noted how managers such as Abbott, Kendall, Long and Oakley emphasised their success in carrying out organisational requests; whereas initiated quests position the manager as an experienced and capable agent who acts in response to need, drawing on their personal expertise which gives them insight not available to the organisation (e.g. Bailey, Jennings, Newton) or enables them to implement a personal vision, as suggested by the accounts of Chapman and Taylor . Finally, stories of battles construct managers as defenders and protectors of others and suggest a moral dimension of management as 'doing the right thing' in response to an injustice. This is nicely illustrated by Varley who explicitly

constructs their story of taking a sick staff member to hospital (villainy as the effects of illness) as an example of doing the right thing:

> *You turn up to somebody's door and their eyes are yellow and everything's going mad, what do you do, walk away and there's nobody else to help...I've never made a fanfare about it, I've never really said anything to anybody about it.* – 'V', team leader

Plot analysis therefore reveals both the very different ways in which a manager role may be conceptualised and experienced, and the very personal ways in which managers make sense of such ambiguities through narrative (Hopkinson, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). By reading manager stories as plot it has been possible to uncover some of the subtle but distinctive ways in which managers may author themselves: as a successful hero in search of personal betterment and achievement, or as a disguised or hidden one struggling to gain recognition; as a loyal and reliable servant of the organisation or as an independent agent who seeks out and responds to need or injustice. In other words, although the research data is drawn from single self-presentations of managers within the context of research interviews, it nevertheless highlights the range of different ways in which one might present oneself as a manager and therefore the different ways in which one might 'be' a manager, and how manager roles may be experienced. The next section examines how analysis of manager stories in terms of narrative roles further reveals some of the different ways in which managers – and management – may be authored.

### 6.3.3 Reading manager stories as narrative roles

The next stage of narrative analysis involves identifying the different roles, or *dramatis personae*, within a story. Propp (1968) argues that although there may be an infinite range of 'personages' there are a very limited number of roles which fulfil specific narrative functions. The categories of *dramatis personae* are set out in table 2 (section 5.4.3). As with plot analysis, the research has further amended, clarified and developed the nature and roles of narrative *dramatis personae* from Propp's original (1968) typology. Whereas Propp regards them as mere instigators of narrative functions, such that the characters inhabiting different roles provide mere colour to the tale and do not fundamentally affect the narrative, this research also pays attention to which organisational actors are cast into which narrative roles.

Analysis of the narrative roles adopted by the manager themselves, and roles ascribed to others, enables further insight into the manager's workplace identity and their perceived relations with and positioning against others.

**Narrative roles adopted by managers**

The majority of managers adopted the role of the hero in their chosen stories: that is, the central character who undertakes action to resolve lack or struggle with villainy, or who must gain recognition and prove their qualities. Nevertheless, there are some exceptions. First, both Dawson and Long share the central hero role with others. Although Long frames their story of achieving an accreditation as an example of their personal success – "right from the outset they said, no, you do it, you project manage it, you know, you're the [one] with the [ ] knowledge, you do it" – they almost exclusively tell their story in a plural voice in which it is not always clear whether "we" refers to Long themselves, their staff, the management team or the whole service area. Dawson's story casts their team as heroes who assist customers to resolve problems, but their language also claims their team's achievements as their own. Although Dawson does not directly assist customers themselves, helping customers still represents the meaning of their role, and they similarly blur their own role with those of the team they manage:

> *What more can you ask? If you can help someone... you're very lucky to be able to do that, you know. I'm happy but I'm proud of the team and I'm proud of what we try to achieve and that, so in that respect I think, you know, sometimes you can hold your head up high and think, you know, I've done, at least I've tried to help someone, I've done my best for them.* – Dawson, team leader

A number of managers also adopt other narrative roles in their storytelling: that is, they tell stories in which other organisational actors fulfil the role of the hero who undertakes action to resolve lack or struggle with villainy. The father refers to one who dispatches the hero, and who also provides recognition and verification that the hero has fulfilled their task or should be recognised. This role is adopted by Everett who dispatches staff to assist customers and determines their success, and by Shaw who formally recognises and promotes the qualities of managers and potential managers in their service area. Newton also describes a form of father role: having

organised the community event (a hero role) their role then shifts to ensuring that staff are directly engaging and interacting with customers in order to find out and address their needs; and their text also suggests some degree of verifying how their staff fulfil their roles by supporting staff to reflect on how their practice fulfils organisational values. The helper is one who provides direct assistance to the hero in their quest or struggle: for example Newton and Dawson describe providing expert knowledge to staff who are working with customers; Newton and Reed both describe being able to facilitate staff actions and outcomes through their higher organisational position – "I just might know who to pull directly for them, to resolve an issue" – (Newton, team leader); Shaw directly offers mediation and support to their two conflicting managers; and Hancock describes assisting tenants to campaign for a second vote on stock transfer. The donor is one who interrogates or tests the hero and whom the hero must satisfy in order to gain a magical agent to assist them, or to be able to proceed. The clearest example of this is Varley's role in a recruitment panel which involves testing the staff member (the hero) who is seeking promotion, but Shaw can also be seen as acting as a Donor in requiring their managers to demonstrate their ability to work together.

Adopting roles such as father, helper or donor is not simply a reflection of the manager's role in supporting and developing staff. Read as narrative plot, managers who adopt roles other than the hero are telling stories in which other actors undertake the hero role and they themselves are supporting characters. Narrative analysis therefore offers some insight into how managers might differently construct their organisational roles and their organisational purpose: whether they choose to present themselves as primarily taking action themselves, or as facilitators of the work and actions of others; and the different kinds of ways in which managers might facilitate the work and actions of others. Whereas helper roles emphasise directly supporting and enabling staff, a father or a donor role still affords the manager some distance and authority as one who dispatches and verifies, or tests the capabilities of others; and helper and donor roles both emphasise the importance of knowledge held by the manager and differentiates them from others.

**Narrative roles ascribed to others**

Further insight into the personal construction of organisational roles can be gained by analysing the organisational and other actors whom managers include in their stories, and the roles ascribed to them within manager storytelling.

**The father**

The father is categorised as one who dispatches the hero, either on a quest to find or rescue a victim, or who sets the hero difficult tasks and ultimately recognises and verifies their qualities (table 2, section 5.4.3). For managers who told stories characterised as dispatched quests (Abbott, Kendall, Long and Oakley) the organisation is positioned as a dispatcher of the manager on a quest in the service of the organisation, and those managers also referred to recognition from the organisation that they had been successful: "it's been an experience because you don't know how these things are going to work until you get feedback from other people" (Oakley, team leader). Oakley's text also suggests how being 'dispatched' by the organisation and successfully fulfilling the task supports their growing recognition of themselves as a manager:

> *So the marketing task, working with other people, doing something that was related to the business objectives and it was something that, you know, I'd implemented. And it's sort of - it is a positive thing isn't it, it's a task that I've been asked to do and I've done it.* – Oakley, team leader

For Jennings, their story of initiated quest describes a struggle for organisational recognition of the value of their service area, and achieving such recognition represents the completion of the story:

> *[It] kind of <u>really</u> encouraged me that actually the tables had really turned from – just go and sit in a corner and we're not really sure what you do and we're not really bothered, to actually we believe in [your service area] and here's [more resources] because we believe that you'll do the right thing...and you'll get the outcomes.* – Jennings, service manager

As a team leader Irwin also seeks organisational recognition for the value of their role as a manager through a new job title which properly reflects their understanding of the role, but this remains elusive: "We manage the service, we don't just supervise

staff, we manage the actual service and I know it's only a title but it's a title that I think is necessary if you're doing the job."

**Donors and helpers**

The donor is one who tests the hero, while helpers directly assist the hero, for example by helping them to find the victim or sought-after object (table 2, section 5.4.3). For several managers (Fleming, Goddard, Reed and Woods) being helped and tested by their own line manager is presented as an important factor in them being or becoming a manager. Fleming's story particularly positions more senior managers as donors who test them. Their reform of their service area is achieved in part through a series of literal, often difficult interrogations by senior managers including their own line manager, through which they come to realise what they need to do to be successful: have a thorough understanding of their service themselves, and act authentically towards their team. Fleming interprets these interrogations as tests which they eventually pass:

> *A lot of the stuff that was said was hurtful, it was really I suppose, sort of (pause) I suppose a slap in the face (pause) <u>but</u> (pause) it's what you do from that point...do you then break down or do you pick yourself up and shake yourself off and move forward.* – Fleming, service manager

Other sources of being tested by donors in manager stories include external assessors who test the organisation (Hancock and Long); and staff, to whom Potter deliberately subjects themselves to testing, casting them into the role of donor by asking them what they want from Potter as a team leader: "because I see my role as being empowering <u>them</u> to perform as best they can, so giving them the things that they need to do the job" (Potter, team leader). For Goddard, Reed and Woods their own line managers are positioned as helpers, assisting them to grow in their manager role: for Goddard this included being given new responsibilities before they sought promotion to strengthen their eventual application. However, in Abbott's story it was their team leaders who helped Abbott to change the culture of the team they sought to integrate because of their existing relationship with staff and commitment to supporting Abbott's goal.

**Victims and villains**

Victims may be the subjects of villainy or of a quest (table 2, section 5.4.3). In manager stories the role of victim is filled by customers who either suffer from the effects of villainy caused by external events (Dawson, Everett, Irwin, Miller) or lack due to organisational ignorance (Bailey, Newton), or staff members who are either 'lost' (Abbott) or suffering the effects of internal forms of organisational villainy (Fleming, Miller, Shaw, Taylor, Varley) and the significance of this difference is addressed in the next section with analysis of the ways in which managers construct their social worlds. The role filled by villains offers particular insight into manager constructions. Externally, villains affecting customers include other customers and residents (Irwin, Miller), campaigners against stock transfer (Hancock) and the generalised effects of external changes and government reforms (Dawson, Everett) as well as unspecified misfortune and difficulty compounded by lack of organisational recognition (Bailey, Newton). Internally there was very limited criticism of the organisation by managers in their texts, with only two managers citing existing senior managers for the way they sometimes accuse staff (Miller) or make decisions (Varley) without checking all the facts first. However, Abbott, Fleming and Shaw all referred to the effects of former managers on their staff, which may represent a useful strategy for enabling managers to characterise bad management whilst demonstrating organisational loyalty. Taylor's text particularly suggests the tensions of initiating change whilst remaining loyal to the organisation. In their story they describe themselves as acting as the team's defender, "to put an arm around them, and to sort of bat <u>for</u> them at my level with my peers". They suggest that the team's feelings of being badly treated by the organisation were more about the team's perceptions rather than organisational actions:

> *The team had a bad reputation, or, the perception of the team was that it had a bad reputation and that they were – you know, they <u>felt</u> they were the fall guys for anything that was sort of, you know, could not be designated as somebody's job role.* – Taylor, service manager

However, the actions that Taylor then describes themselves as taking to improve the team's morale include ensuring they are able to enjoy the new facilities shared by other staff, getting them invited to award nights and promoting the value of their work to other managers. In constructing the story in terms of addressing ways in

which the organisation could better recognise the team (in contrast to Abbott's story which focused on bringing a 'lost' team back into the organisation and enabling them to adopt organisational values and standards) Taylor's story may be read as a battle with and defeat of unintentional organisational villainy rather than a quest; but it also illustrates how a manager may carefully seek to avoid direct criticism of organisational actions, by constructing the problem as the team's perception, whilst still describing how they have responded to the effects of those actions.

**Summary – reading manager stories as role**

Analysing manager stories in terms of narrative roles reveals a number of important insights into the different ways in which managers may author and construct themselves and others in their organisational roles. First, such narrative analysis can suggest the importance and nature of relationships with other organisational actors (Sims, 2005a; Whittle, et al., 2009) which may not be explicitly acknowledged. For example, Abbott, Hancock, Jennings and Taylor all told (current) stories involving services or teams that were not perceived to be fully included or recognised, while Miller and Varley's stories involved criticism of manager decisions and values; but almost all managers also referenced the discourse of 'shared moral purpose' during their interviews in which the organisation works as one for the benefit of customers. Role analysis may also reveal useful insights into the nature of managerial verification. Constructing and sustaining a managerial identity requires verification from others (Beech, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; McDonald, et al., 2008; Watson, 2008) but managers at Panorama described seeking verification from a wide range of different organisational sources. These included direct verification and recognition from their team (Potter), from their line manager and other senior managers (Fleming, Reed, Woods) or from the organisation (Hancock, Irwin and Miller who sought different grades or job titles, and Kendall who sought an organisational role that appropriately reflected their skills). Managers also described seeking and gaining verification more indirectly. Hancock and Jennings both suggested that organisational recognition of their service areas was a verification of their own managerial roles. Other managers described finding personal verification of their managerial qualities through reflecting on their own experiences. Abbott presented their chosen story as an important way in which they developed as a manager: "I think it's <u>really</u> taught me about how to lead people". Similarly, Oakley's text has

been interpreted as a meta-story in which, in response to their inability to fulfil team expectations of the manager as expert, Oakley constructs an alternative managerial identity which draws on organisational discourses of management and their willingness to take up opportunities for management qualifications in order to construct and support a managerial identity: “Having the qualifications does help. I know experience is important as well but I think if you’ve got the balance it does help” (Oakley, team leader).

In contrast, other manager stories did not include any explicit reference to or concern with gaining verification of their manager or other qualities: within their presented stories and texts their skills and qualities are not in question, either for the manager themselves or for others. This is closely linked to another aspect of narrative analysis. As well as studying how the different narrative roles are cast within manager stories, role analysis may also suggest the relative importance of others within the story for the narrating manager, and therefore offers insight into how the manager may experience their organisational role and constructs an organisational identity (whilst recognising the manager texts as context-specific self-presentations and an account of experience rather than the experience itself). Managers such as Chapman, Goddard, Newton and Taylor tell stories in which their own role as hero (or donor or helper) is unambiguous and which does not rely on other narrative roles. Other managers tell stories in which other roles play a significant part in their own story and its meaning, such as recognition by a father or testing by a donor, or customers or staff members as victims in need of rescue; or who blend their roles and stories with those of others; or who adopt multiple roles within their stories. This may be illustrated by contrasting the stories of Chapman and Fleming. Both are stories of coming into the organisation and seeking to transform the culture and performance of their respective service areas. However, as noted above, Fleming’s story is one of battle and existential struggle, to overcome the effects of former managerial villains and to fulfil current organisational expectations of becoming a manager, through eventually passing the numerous tests posed by senior managers (donors). A managerial identity is hard-earned and dependent on overcoming and convincing many others. In contrast, Chapman’s story is of the hero coming into the organisation with a clear vision and delivering it successfully with no obstacles: “When someone says we’ll give the blank canvas and you do what you want, that’s

exactly what happened." Despite telling superficially similar stories about similar managerial roles, a narrative plot and role analysis reveals significant differences in Chapman's and Fleming's managerial experience, self-presentations and identity work.

The roles adopted by managers themselves may also reveal important insights into their experience and the ways in which they construct a managerial identity. The value of this may be illustrated by considering the issue of managers as former practitioners, who have been promoted from team members directly delivering services to managerial positions (Bolton, 2005; Currie & Brown, 2003; Warhurst, 2011). Newton's story constructs them as adopting a range of narrative roles: first as the hero in recognising and initiating the need for further customer assistance, but then shifting to a father role in dispatching staff to speak to customers and identity their needs, and as helper in supporting staff. In shifting between and blending these roles they draw on their experience as a practitioner to offer critical insight and guidance to staff in their own practice:

> *If you think what the principle means, you think well how can I put that into practice, that's the bit that I like and enjoy because that's requiring a bit more creativity, it's requiring not just doing it myself, it's about selling that vision to, to other staff you want to try and give them an understanding of the true <u>value</u> of what they <u>do</u>.* – Newton, team leader

Dawson also describes such a facilitative role, but as previously noted, their text also seeks to underplay distinctions between themselves and their team, suggesting that they still seek to construct themselves primarily as a (senior) practitioner rather than a manager, as a fellow hero with their team: "So that's how we do it, we're <u>always</u> communicating and work with each other" *(*Dawson, team leader). In contrast, the roles adopted by Newton maintain their distinction from their team as one who is both more experienced and able to set and direct tasks for them. Bailey illustrates another response to the role of managers as former practitioners. In their chosen story they adopt a hero role in which they actively lead a programme of work to improve facilities for vulnerable tenants. Although they are no longer a practitioner they maintain a central role in their story of delivering the programme, as one who agrees on the work, leads and co-ordinates it, manages the budget and plans future

works: “it’s my baby”. Their managerial role enables them to continue to fulfil their commitment to vulnerable tenants “cos for me there has to be...meaning behind what I do”. Again, this is in contrast to Newton whose initial hero role is complemented by supporting their staff to carry out the goals they have identified. The challenges of being able to let go of former practitioner activities in which they had been successful are recognised (Austin, et al., 2013; McConville & Holden, 1999); but narrative role analysis reveals some of the subtly different and nuanced ways in which managers may seek to construct a role which continues to have personal meaning, and utilises their practitioner knowledge and experience.

### 6.3.4 A narrative reading of manager identity

Narratives enable us to understand and contextualise people’s beliefs regarding what they believe to be most significant about themselves (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) and the ways in which they account for themselves and others (Brown, 2006; Brown & Humphreys, 2006). The methods of story elicitation and narrative analysis reveal not so much the unsurprising diversity of managerial roles and functions that managers are required to fulfil but how, given the opportunity to present themselves as they wished, managers chose to privilege different manager functions, such as such as delivering tasks, managing staff relationships or responding to tenant needs, in their storytelling. Analysing manager stories in terms of plot structure and narrative roles further reveals how managers may individually author themselves and others: as heroes on personal or organisational quests, as donors and helpers to other organisational heroes, as loyal servants or as responsive agents. It also reveals the ways in which various and varying others may be positioned as being involved with, influencing or impinging upon the manager: as fathers recognising the manager’s qualities, as victims to be defended or villains to be challenged, as donors and helpers to be assisted by. Narrative analysis reveals not simply the range of different functions involved in management but the range of possible meanings of management and the range of ways in which managers fulfilling similar organisational roles may construct, define and author themselves. Narrative analysis has therefore been highly effective in contributing towards research objective 3: *to uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles*. Moreover, the findings revealed so far through narrative analysis therefore strongly support calls not to treat

managers as homogenous entities based on their organisational or hierarchical level (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002). The implications of treating managers as individuals with highly personal responses to their organisational position are developed throughout the research findings, analysis and discussion (chapters 6, 7 and 8).

Narrative analysis also starts to uncover some of the discursive resources used by managers, and offers insight into the ways in which managers may respond to, and position themselves within or against organisational narratives (Beech & Johnson, 2005; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). Some managers draw on the organisation (or individual senior managers) to construct and sustain identity, but in different ways: as a narrative reflection of their own development (Goddard who has "seen it from the beginning"); as a template for a good manager (Abbott, Fleming, Oakley); as a setter of tasks to fulfil (Kendall, Long); as a verifier of the manager and their qualities (Fleming, Hancock, Jennings, Reed, Woods and Irwin (unsuccessfully)). Others drew on personal meanings which are not constructed as dependent on organisational verification: Chapman and Taylor described bringing their own vision to their service areas; Bailey, Dawson and Newton drew on their practitioner experience to construct particular – but distinct – manager identities; Miller and Varley suggested that they knew better than their own managers what their managerial role and responsibilities, and organisational values should be. In the next section the individual ways in which managers respond to their organisational context is further examined through a paradigmatic analysis of their stories.

## 6.4 Medial manager texts: paradigmatic analysis

This section continues the second stage of analysis and the addressing of research objective 3 – the self-presentations of medial managers – by presenting a paradigmatic analysis of the medial manager interview texts. Drawing on the work of Levi-Strauss (1963, 1983) this analysis is built on the concept that individuals not only construct narratives in order to make sense of themselves over time, but to establish and trace a mediating path through a social landscape of selected oppositions. In other words, having established the narrative structure of the stories told by managers, this level of analysis is concerned with the social landscapes that managers construct through their storytelling, and how they position themselves

within that social world. The section demonstrates how such paradigmatic analysis, which looks for sets of oppositions within the manager stories and wider interview texts, may reveal insights into the nature of the organisational, social worlds in which managers work – that is, the sources of identity regulation they are subject to – and also offers insight into the identity work undertaken by managers, by revealing the very different natures and dimensions of the social worlds that they construct.

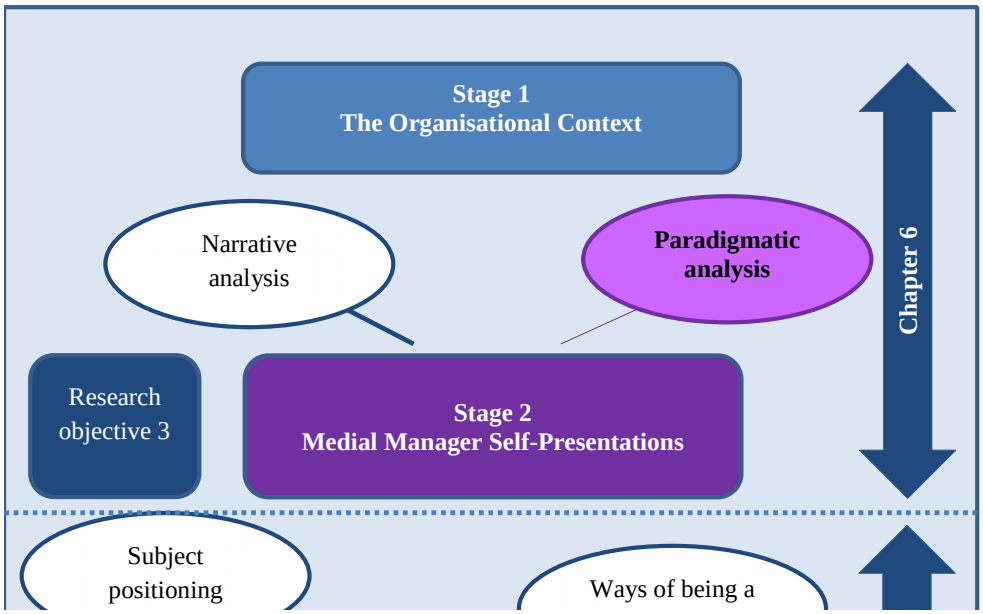


**Figure 8 - Position of paradigmatic analysis within the analytical process**

### 6.4.1 Constructing a social world

This section presents the paradigmatic analysis of each medial manager interview text. Following a form of thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010) described in section 5.4.3 the interview texts were read and coded in terms of oppositions. These descriptive oppositions were then clustered into higher level interpretative codes, and finally into an overall thematic code which characterises the overall way in which the medial manager constructed an organisational and social world within their interview text.

A summary example of such coding for manager Goddard is provided in figure 9. Goddard's narrative coding was previously illustrated in in section 6.3.2, figure 7. Goddard's story of becoming a team leader has been characterised as a personal quest, and included the challenge of "having to manage people who you were once before". Paradigmatic analysis of Goddard's story and the subsequent discussion

and exploration of the meaning of the story for Goddard identified a number of oppositions which seemed to directly emerge from their personal challenge of becoming a team leader. One common theme emerged around the role of expertise and experience. Goddard was aware that many team members were older and more experienced than they were as the new team leader (age vs position); but Goddard also contrasted the unwillingness of some older and more experienced team members to embrace and adapt to change compared to their own willingness: "that's the way we've always done it" which was characterised as 'experience vs development and progress'. Conversely, however, Goddard contrasted themselves with their own manager, this time drawing on their own knowledge and experience as one who "fully understand[s]" the service systems in contrast to their manager who has a strategic overview only (being hand-on vs being strategic), or senior managers who do not understand the implications of what they are asking for (organisational expectations vs organisational realities). These oppositions were therefore organised into an interpretative cluster around direct experience – which Goddard both has and lacks – vs distant strategy which Goddard both implements as organisational development, and works in contrast to. A second theme emerged around contrasting management style and responsibilities. Goddard emphasised the importance of not just directing staff – "I'm not just there to say, you know, 'Can you get that [ ], can you get that [ ]" – but supporting them. However, they also draw a careful distinction between having a good relationship and being over-friendly: for example they will go on work social events but don't socialise with the team on non-work occasions. These oppositions were therefore characterised as directing work – including the right level of respect as well as imposing decisions – vs supporting people, including being over-friendly as well as managing staff as individuals. Finally the key oppositions within the text were considered in terms of their content, relationships between themes and significance within the text as a whole in order to identify an overarching theme of experience and expertise vs change and development, in which 'change and development' reflected not only the organisational objectives implicit in its strategic decisions and direction, but also the more inclusive and adaptive management style required to both support staff and persuade them to adopt new ways of working. As Goddard put it, "it's explaining the rationale behind it and giv[ing] them the opportunity to suggest any ways...so it's just you being open to change and them being able to change as well."

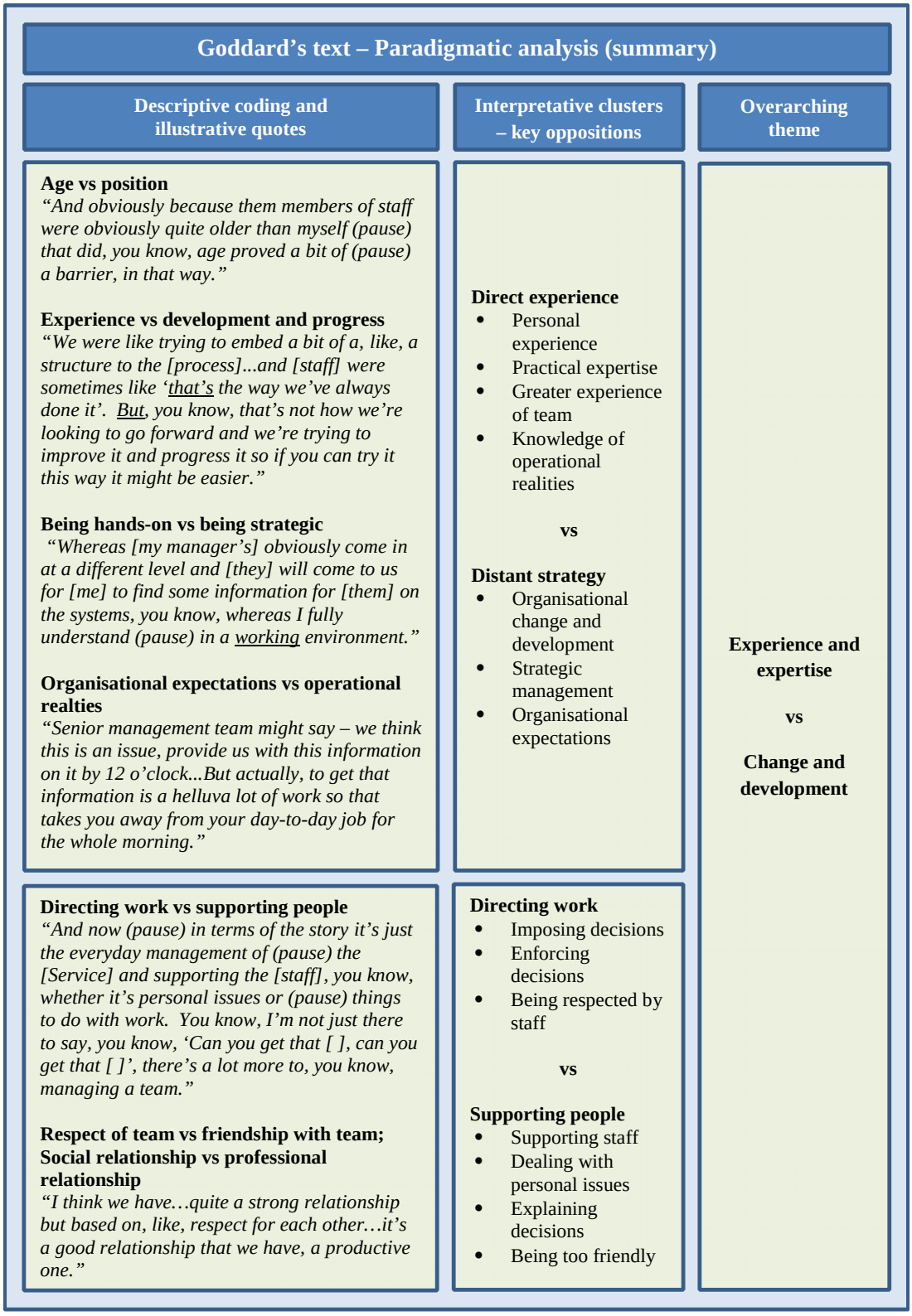


**Figure 9 – Coded example of paradigmatic analysis**

The final thematic level of analysis developed for each manager was then reviewed across all twenty one manager texts in order to establish relationships and common

themes. This resulted in identifying four different ways of constructing the organisation: across vertical, horizontal, internal or external dimensions. These four dimensions, and the thematic coding of managers which underpins them, are presented in figure 10. A more detailed presentation of the underpinning analysis is presented in section 6.4.2, table 7, which also extends the analysis to address the relationship between such ways of constructing the organisation and the stories told by managers.

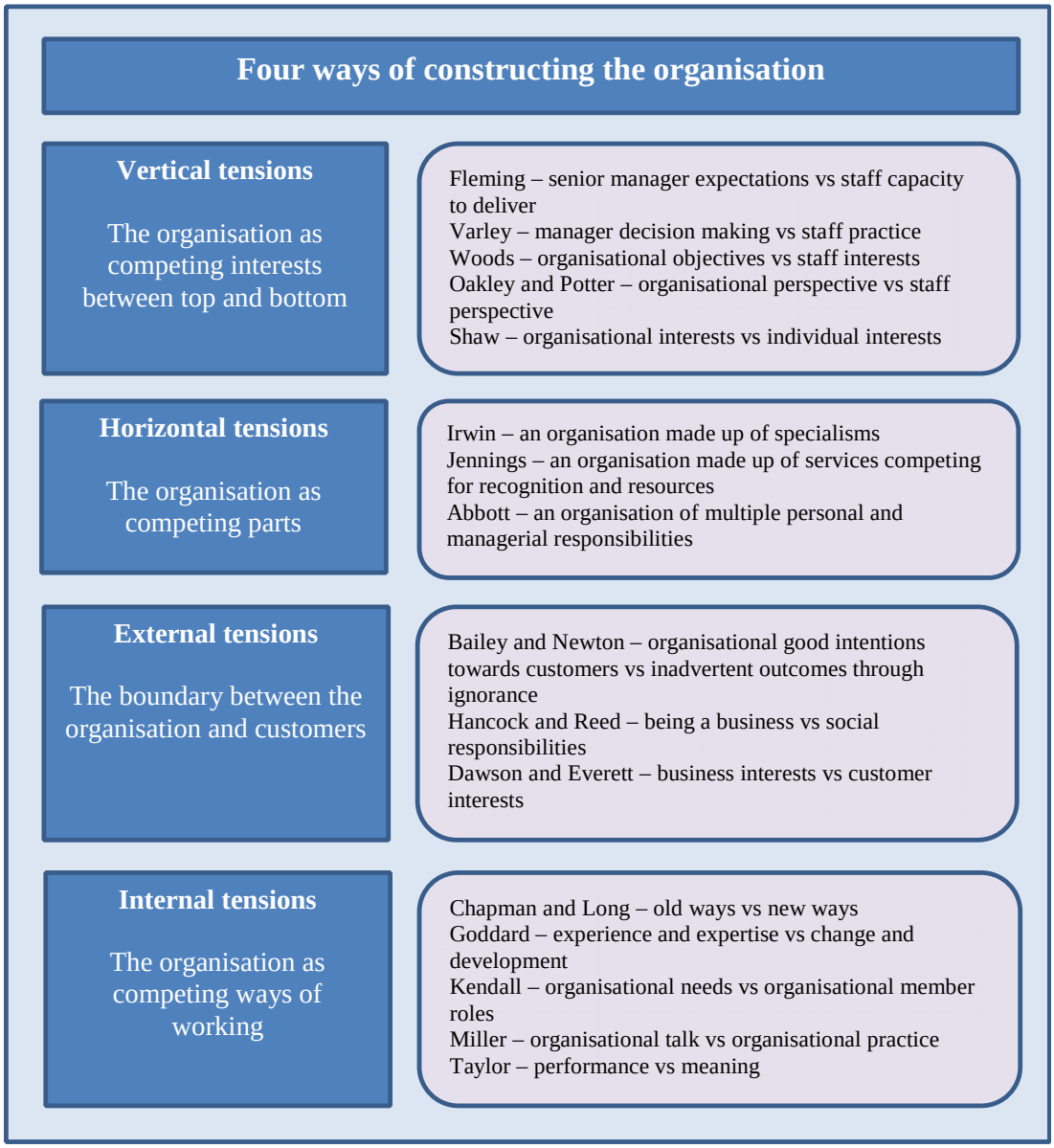


**Figure 10 – Four ways of constructing the organisation**

Vertical tensions construct the organisation primarily around tensions between top and bottom, as differing or competing perspectives and interests between the

organisation and its objectives – often personified as senior managers – and staff and the operational delivery of services. Such tensions are expressed in a number of ways and with differing degrees of significance. For three managers, Varley, Fleming and Woods, vertical tensions were integral to their chosen stories. Varley constructs the most explicit tension between senior managers, and particularly their decision-making, and Varley's experience of operational practice. Their text includes a number of incidents in which organisational decisions have been taken without accounting for their effect on the team: "all that kind of thing goes out of the window, nobody's considered that, nobody's talked to us about that"; and their talk draws heavily on the language of combat to describe managing the relationship between team and organisation, including "fight", "fighting battles" "picking battles", pushing issues up "the chain of command" and "manoeuvring" their manager. A key problem faced by Fleming, in their story of reforming their service area, was the tension between senior manager expectations and the ability of staff to deliver those expectations, a tension which had been exacerbated by the failure of previous managers to effectively manage the service and shield staff from senior manager criticism resulting from their failure. Woods' 'difficult task' of managing the staff rota is explained by Woods as being about balancing the need to achieve business objectives and maintain the necessary cover at all times, and the interests of staff who deliver those objectives. For Oakley, Potter and Shaw such tensions between organisation and staff interests are acknowledged but form less significant themes. Oakley's account of an organisational restructure and their reflections on wider service management recognise that there may be differences in organisational and staff perceptions, for example where staff believe that "dealing with the people is more important than putting the figures together". Potter's story of becoming a team leader suggests that staff may not always consider the bigger picture beyond their own needs; and in telling their story of helping two managers work together Shaw reflected on the need for organisations to develop and implement policies that support staff and their needs, as well as merely being concerned with what is easiest for the business:

> *You know, not to say on paper we'll do it and then if it's a bit hard, go oh well never mind we tried and it didn't really work, because (p) we'd be losing a lot*

*of input from good staff who, who, you know who wouldn't be able to do what they do otherwise, I think.* – Shaw, operations director

Horizontal tensions construct the organisation in terms of different, sometimes competing teams and services. Jennings' story is about the struggle to not only grow and develop their service but to establish its value within the organisation and gain recognition, and they construct an organisation in which services are effectively in competition with each other to gain attention: "Yes, I definitely would say the work out there is far easier than the in-house kind of selling of the service" (Jennings, service manager). Abbott and Irwin similarly suggest that other teams get more recognition than their own, and Irwin further develops this by constructing their team as unique within the organisation: while most teams only have a specialism "we go into their jobs as well where they don't come to ours, they just ask questions, sometimes if they're not in work we're asked the questions" (Irwin, team leader). Their story of co-ordinating the organisational response to the flood reinforces this: "like a spider's web going out, everyone else doing their own little thing...we were in the centre and it went out to everyone else and they came back to us". Abbott's text is constructed as a set of multiple and competing personal responsibilities. Tensions between being a manager and a practitioner, between unique service and staff needs and common organisational needs, and between directing and delivering services, and leading and engaging people all criss-cross between poles of responsibility: to customers, to the organisation, to their service area and to their staff: "I seem to run round quite a lot...you've got to put different hats on all the time" (Abbott, service manager). Abbott presents their story as an example of the balance they have discovered that management incorporates: driving forward change and service delivery but also engaging and leading staff through change. Integrating the 'lost' team involved blending and flexing between upholding organisational standards and building relationships, whilst also ensuring other teams Abbot is responsible for did not feel neglected, and that operational responsibilities were fulfilled.

External tensions construct the organisation as outward facing around tensions between organisational interests and actions, and its customers. Such tensions may between organisational intention and outcome: both Bailey and Newton construct the organisation as seeking to improve the lives of customers but sometimes lacking the necessary knowledge and insight "because you can put barriers in place and not

realise your barrier is there" (Bailey, service manager). Reed and Hancock construct the organisation around the tension between being a commercial business and its social responsibilities towards customers and the community: for example, Reed's meta-story of becoming a manager draws on the tensions between managing a team of practitioners concerned with customer outcomes and fulfilling organisational interests such as concern for value for money, but also constructs the organisation as seeking to combine its statutory duties as a social housing provider with a commercial drive to offer added value to its customers: "Panorama have made the decision to implement that into their services, but then it goes towards – it's all about the visions and to be the best and, you know, want to offer more" (Reed, service manager). Dawson and Everett both indirectly draw on the competing interests of the business and customers with regard to rental income; and Everett's choice of co-ordinating the organisational response to legislative changes and their effects on customers particularly reflects this: "We've done a lot of work for the benefit of customers and for people which is close to my heart, but not at the expense of the business again close to my heart" (Everett, operations director).

Internal tensions construct the organisation in terms of different or competing internal values and ways of working. This category is the most diverse and may be considered as a residual category, but it nevertheless demonstrates some common themes. The texts of Chapman and Long both contrast the old (council) and new organisation. Chapman's chosen story emphasises how they transformed the organisation from its under-performing history, particularly through implementing more business-focused practices, and Long refers a number of times to ways in which they see Panorama as positively improving on its council origins, such as decision making:

> *The Council was so slow moving...it could be nine months or ten months before, you know, something came through. Whereas I have sat in meetings here, and somebody's come up with a good idea and the following day we've implemented that change, and erm - so it can be that quick, we can change that quickly.* – 'L', team leader

Linked to this past and present/future theme, as previously noted, Goddard constructs the organisation in terms of past experience and expertise, and openness

to change and development with the organisation going forward. In contrast Kendall constructs the organisation in terms of clearly delineated roles and responsibilities: for example their role is to provide expert knowledge operationally but for the benefit of their manager to make appropriate decisions: "I think...one of my roles is to make them aware of when things aren't...going right and what we need to put in place to make it go right" ('K', team leader). Kendall's chosen story describes how they were able to use their particular skills and experience in the service of the organisation, and having accomplished that task, were then eventually able to secure another position which recognised those skills. Miller constructs the organisation around a tension between its self-image and its actions. The organisation claims to be different to Seeborough Council but still has an "old-fashioned" approach to pay based on length of service rather than experience; senior managers do not live up to their ethical standards when they criticise staff without knowing all the facts; and aspirations of employee welfare contrast with the demands of working in very difficult and challenging communities. Finally Taylor's story of transforming their service area differs subtly from that of Chapman: rather than implementing better business practices, Taylor's story of reforming their service area is achieved through re-inscribing their team's organisational role: as a general service they provide a holistic service to customers and therefore taking work that other services cannot is a sign of their value. Similarly Taylor re-inscribes the meaning of performance, which should not just be about data but the impact on customers and the challenges that the team have overcome to achieve it. Like Miller, therefore, Taylor contrasts organisational and business axioms with their own personal interpretation of the meaning of their service area and its success.

The implications of a paradigmatic analysis of medial manager texts are significant. A Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) understanding of identity work draws attention not only to the ways in which managers construct themselves, but to the ways in which a social world is constructed. That is, identity work should be understood not only as constructing a self-identity, but as constructing a social world in which that self-identity has a meaningful position: it is a "mutually constitutive" process (Watson, 2008, p. 129). The four different ways of constructing the organisation suggest some of the different actors and relationships which are foregrounded in different social worlds and which imply different positions from which managers might construct

self-identities: as between staff and senior managers; between other teams and services; between the organisation and customers; or between values and ways of working. It should also be noted that these different constructions of the organisation cut across different managerial levels: each type of organisational construction is reflected in both team leader and service manager texts, while the two operations directors construct externally and vertically based oppositions respectively. The next section continues the application of Levi-Straussian analysis to analyse the ways in which medial managers position themselves within their constructed social worlds, and how they seek to mediate the oppositions that their texts highlight.

### 6.4.2 Mediating social dimensions

A mythical conceptualisation of narrative self-identity argues that it is through narrative that individuals trace a mediating or intervening path through the social landscapes they have constructed from "deep structures" of oppositions (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983). The final stage of paradigmatic analysis is therefore to analyse the ways in which the stories told by medial managers establish such a mediating path.

Figure 11 presents a summary of this analysis for Goddard. Goddard's story of being promoted from the team to become a team leader has been analysed as a personal quest (figure 7, section 6.3.2) and their interview text has been analysed paradigmatically as being constructed around an opposition of experience and expertise versus change and development (figure 9, section 6.4.1). Figure 11 illustrates how Goddard's story establishes a mediating position through this tension as the 'developing manager'. Their story and text repeatedly refers to joining the service and the organisation "from the beginning". Their origin establishes them in their new role as one who is "hands on" and understands the "working environment" in contrast to their own manager and other senior managers who do not always appreciate operational realities in their expectations; but it also distinguishes Goddard from older, more experienced team members who rely on the "old" ways before Panorama and "how we've always done it". Goddard's story and wider text can therefore be read as constructing a position in contrast to both their team and their own manager: they retain essential knowledge and experience from their past but are also open to growing and developing along with the organisation: "So really

I've seen it from the beginning, it's grown...and I've been a part of that change...the whole organisation's developed a lot which I think to be made to feel part of that change is important". This positioning as one who has grown and developed with the organisation also forms the basis for a mediating position between competing managerial responsibilities: Goddard is open to listening to staff and their concerns over decisions, in accordance with organisational values of staff involvement and engagement, but staff must also earn that right by demonstrating openness to trying out changes themselves. Goddard's story both sets up a social world based on oppositions between past experience and expertise, and future change and improvement, and also establishes the means by which Goddard mediates these tensions.


**Figure 11 – Example of narrative mediation**

Table 7 below sets out a summary of such analysis for each medial manager, and how the stories told by medial managers and wider narratives identified within the interview texts both construct the manager's personal social world and establish a mediating position within it (Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983). Figure 12 below provides a summary of each manager position organised by the broad way of constructing the organisation across vertical, horizontal, external or internal tensions.

Section 6.3 has demonstrated how narrative analysis of medial manager stories through plot structure and narrative roles can reveal rich insights into the ways in which medial managers understand and present their organisational roles, and the personal meanings of those roles. A paradigmatic analysis further reveals how such stories both construct a particular social and organisational world and establish a personal position and meaning within that world.

First, it is not just the story as told by the manager, but the particular nature of the plot and narrative roles which construct the manager's mediating position within their constructed social world. For example, Fleming's story of battling the effects of former senior manager villains informs both their construction of a vertically-based organisation, based on the downward pressures and expectations of senior managers on staff, and their positioning of themselves as the 'insulation' between staff and senior managers: Fleming's battle with the effects of former manager villainy involves striving to reassure staff that they are different and will take personal responsibility and admit personal mistakes, rather than blaming staff. Similarly the interpreted meta-story of existential struggle and the need to meet the testing requirements of their 'donor' manager also inform the nature of their insulator position, as the way they are able to give confidence to senior managers through their personal understanding of their service. It is therefore a mythical understanding of narrative, which attends to both the narrative and paradigmatic structure of stories, and which recognises both the social world constructed through the story and the narrator's positioning of themselves and others within it, which enables a rich and detailed analysis of the identity work undertaken by managers through their storytelling and self-presentations: the "mutually constitutive" (Watson, 2008) and dynamic process between the individual's sense of self at any moment in time, and the ways in which they respond to and are constrained by discursive practices.

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world - detailed**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Abbott**<br><br>Service manager | **Horizontal**<br><br>***A world of multiple personal, managerial responsibilities***<br><br>Tensions between being a practitioner and a manager, differences and commonalities, service delivery and leading and directive and engaging management criss-cross between poles of responsibility: to customers, to the organisation, the service area and staff. | **Integrating a 'lost' team into the organisation**<br><br>Abbott presents their story as an example of the balance they have discovered that management incorporates: driving forward change and service delivery but also engaging and leading staff through change. Integrating the 'lost' team involves blending and flexing between upholding organisational standards and building relationships, whilst ensuring other teams do not feel neglected and operational responsibilities are fulfilled. | **The Adaptive Manager**<br><br>Creatively sustaining multiple tensions and adapting to different demands. |
| **Bailey**<br><br>Service manager | **External**<br><br>***Organisational intentions for customers vs unintended outcomes***<br><br>The organisation seeking to do good for tenants but lacking expertise to fully understand customer needs. | **Managing a programme to deliver improvements to customers**<br><br>The story exemplifies how Bailey and their team are able to identify customer needs that the organisation is unaware of, or has inadvertently caused. Bailey combines managerial direction and authority with practitioner expertise to effect change on behalf of the organisation and customers. | **The Practitioner-Manager**<br><br>Managing a team of experts to meet customer needs; helping the organisation resolve problems it is unaware of. |
| **Chapman**<br><br>Service manager | **Internal**<br><br>***Old ways vs new ways***<br><br>The organisation's need for new ways of working, for new blood and new ideas; for the right kind of commitment to success.<br><br>Tensions between values - service and the business; public and private; job and career - what's really important; what really creates success? | **Transforming their service area through a personal vision**<br><br>Chapman's story describes how they transformed their service area according to their personal vision. The importance of old ways are recognised in the need to retain customer focus as a social business, but these are blended with a need to recruit and support staff who want to develop careers in the organisation. Staff and team leaders are all moulded in Chapman's image and share their values; and Chapman also promotes their values to the organisation. | **The Embodied Manager**<br><br>Being personally responsible for the service - the service created in their own image - reflecting their personal values. |

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Dawson**<br><br>Team leader | **External**<br><br>***Business interest vs customer interests***<br><br>Dawson's text sets up potential tensions between management as directing and controlling vs management as supporting and involving, and between performance targets and helping customers.<br><br>Dawson constructs a primary external dimension between business interests in collecting rent and customer interests in needing assistance as critical – and it is in the interest of resolving this tension that all other tensions are subordinated. | **Celebrating the team's successes in helping customers manage problems**<br><br>The tension is already resolved because the organisation is aligned in supporting customers to meet its own interests (and thus customer interests). By helping customers to resolve problems they are better able to maintain their tenancies and meet rental obligations. Performance amounts to helping individual customers and gaining successes. The team, and Dawson, are at the heart of this alignment and are equally committed to helping customers and so should be supported and engaged rather than directed and controlled. | **The Helper**<br><br>Providing support to team members. |
| **Everett**<br><br>Operations director | **External**<br><br>***Business interests vs customer interests***<br><br>The organisation is a business with responsibilities towards its customers, but which must also survive and thrive.<br><br>The nature of a social business - balancing responsibilities. | **Co-ordinating a strategic response to legislative changes**<br><br>Everett describes this story as exemplifying their understanding of themselves as a leader, blending direction and engagement with both staff and customers to achieve both business and customer needs. Both customers and staff need to take personal responsibility for their actions and Everett remains the ultimate arbiter as to whether their decisions are appropriate or feasible. | **The Leader**<br><br>Delivering to business and customers through people; achieving goals through people. |
| **Fleming**<br><br>Service manager | **Vertical**<br><br>***Senior manager expectations vs staff capacity to deliver***<br><br>An organisational world made up of downward pressure from senior managers to staff. | **Reforming their service area**<br>***Succeeding as a manager***<br><br>Fleming is able to reform their service area though taking personal responsibility for it and positioning themselves between senior management and staff. They gain control of performance and give confidence by learning from the past; and they build positive relationships with staff by blending service control with their personal example of trust and commitment. | **The Insulator**<br><br>Keeping the pressures of top and bottom apart through personal confidence in Fleming. |

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Goddard** | **Internal** | **Becoming a team leader – 'the rise from the shop floor'** | **The Developing Manager** |
| Team leader | ***Experience and expertise vs change and development*** | Goddard's story of becoming a team leader positions them as blending their knowledge and experience of the team and service area with their willingness to grow and develop with the organisation, and reflecting the organisation's commitment to supporting and developing staff. | Drawing on expertise and experience but willing to learn and develop. Establishing a unique role between the team and their manager. |
| | A world of a growing and developing organisation. | | |
| | Organisational members need to commit to and reflect this growth and development: technical knowledge cannot be a substitute for unwillingness to change. | | |
| **Hancock** | **External** | **The stock transfer** | **The Professional Manager** |
| Service manager | ***Being a business vs social responsibilities*** | **Becoming a manager** | Drawing on discourses of business to support tenant involvement but also professionalising tenants. |
| | The organisation as a business and its responsibility to fully involve and empower its tenants. | Hancock's stories re-construct tenants as partners of the organisation who need to be engaged and involved, but who themselves need to be professionalised in order to be able to contribute to the business. Both the organisation and tenants need to be prepared to adapt. | |
| | The nature of a social business - focusing on its customers. | | |
| **Irwin** | **Horizontal** | **Responding to an emergency flood** | **The Expert Manager** |
| Team leader | ***A organisation made up of specialisms*** | ***Struggle for recognition as a manager*** | Providing cover for other teams; drawing on expertise as well as procedures; mediating between their team and their manager. |
| | An organisation made up of different areas which fit together but are separate. | Irwin's story positions them and their team as mediating between organisational services by taking control and applying their expertise across multiple areas. Similarly, Irwin's wider claim to be a manager is based on their ability balance their decision making based on experience and knowledge with a willingness to adapt and comply with organisational procedure. | |
| | An organisation which has become more professional and properly recognises hierarchical positions and authority, but which cannot wholly rely on process. | | |
| | An organisation which is clearly structured (horizontally and vertically), but which Irwin and their team cut across. | | |

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Jennings** | **Horizontal** | **Growing and promoting their service area** | **The Practitioner-Manager** |
| Service manager | ***An organisation made up of services competing for recognition and resources***<br><br>A business in which managers must compete for recognition and resources. Tensions reflect the struggle for the organisation's 'soul' and the place of the service area within the organisation. Some tensions internal-external - but key is positioning the service area in the organisation's mind. | A key way in which Jennings creates organisational value for their service area is by drawing on the organisational tension between core and value-adding services, and seeking to re-position their service area as core rather than value-added. They draw strongly on their practitioner expertise to make the case, and use their managerial role to speak to the organisation in the right language and to make the case for additional resources. | Responsible for promoting the value of their service within the organisation. |
| **Kendall** | **Internal** | **Developing a new internal system** | **The Deliverer** |
| Team leader | ***Organisational needs vs organisational member roles***<br><br>An organisation which (eventually) recognises the value of its members. An organisation which deserves loyalty even if its interests sometimes conflict with personal ones. Tensions are around extent of responsibilities and the need for appropriate loyalty. Vertical tensions are framed as ways of working and differing levels of responsibilities rather than opposing interests. | Kendall's story constructs them as using their particular expertise in the service of the organisation: they were the best person to undertake the job. This forms the basis for a wider mediation between manager and practitioner roles and staff and organisational interests: what individual members should be expected to do is determined by their experience, grade and role, or "what they signed up for". | One who always delivers on the task. A practitioner who sees and understands the detail – but who is also willing to develop and undertake new roles in the service of the organisation providing they are competent to do so. An expert whose role is to identify problems and issues, and raise them for others to decide on. |
| **Long** | **Internal** | **Gaining an accreditation for the service area** | The ***Manager-Practitioner*** |
| Team leader | ***Old ways vs new ways***<br><br>The improving organisation – improving on the past, growing out the old ways. An organisation in which everyone is committed to developing service excellence. Managers demonstrate practitioner experience and expertise and loyally fulfil organisational requirements. Many tensions (including vertical) are implied but not made explicit or acknowledged; key tension is between the old Council ways and new Panorama ways. | By gaining an accreditation Long combines their practitioner experience with managerial loyalty and competence to meet the organisational requirements. However, within Long's wider text, tensions between demands of practice and performance and staff management are often resolved in favour of management demands, and Long describes themselves as increasingly adopting management practices following their line manager's lead. | Drawing on both, but increasingly subordinating practitioner to manager identity in line with the changing and improving organisation. |

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Miller**<br><br>Team leader | **Internal**<br><br>***Organisational talk vs organisational practice***<br><br>A split-personality organisation. An organisation which fails to see the tensions between what it claims or seeks, and what it does or expects its members to do. An organisation which is working towards being ethical but which sometimes still fails.<br><br>Also some vertical tensions - but focus on contrast between saying and doing. | **Struggling to gain financial recognition**<br>**Defending the team against unreasonable organisational expectations**<br><br>The two stories construct Miller as being able to see the difference between organisational talk and practice. Panorama claims to be a modern organisation drawing on private practices but still pays according to traditional length of time in the post. Panorama claims to be concerned for staff welfare but sometimes fails to recognise the challenges facing staff, while managers sometimes blame staff unfairly. | **The Outsider Manager**<br><br>Constructing an epistemologically advantaged position. Miller sees tensions but does little to actively challenge them. |
| **Newton**<br><br>Team leader | **External**<br><br>***Organisational intentions for customers vs unintended outcomes***<br><br>The organisation seeking to do good for tenants but lacking expertise to fully understand customer needs. Staff are committed to the organisational aims and need to be supported to understand and achieve them. Tension is across organisational boundary - intention and outcome. | **Organising a community event**<br><br>Newton presents the community event as exemplifying their team leader role in blending expert knowledge and concern for practice, and truly meeting organisational needs, with ensuring the effective delivery of those needs and alignment of staff activities with organisational values. | **The Practitioner-Manager**<br><br>Aligning organisational visions and staff practice through expertise, and informing both. |
| **Oakley**<br><br>Team leader | **Vertical**<br><br>***Organisational perspective vs staff perspective***<br><br>An organisational world made up of different perspectives – staff and management. Staff and organisational interests can be aligned through understanding each other. Vertical tensions also reflect manager/practitioner role - in terms of staff expectations of their role. | **Involving staff in a marketing project**<br>**Supporting staff through an organisational restructure**<br>***Becoming a manager***<br><br>Oakley's stories position them as acting to align and mediate organisational and staff interests through their team leader role. The meta-story of becoming a manager can be read as Oakley learning what it means to be such a manager who is concerned for both staff and organisational interests, and who is developing the necessary suite of skills to enable to accomplish such a role. | **The Learning Manager**<br><br>Bringing the team and organisation together; constructing a new identity based on management practice. |

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Potter**<br><br>Team leader | **Vertical**<br><br>***Organisational perspective vs staff perspective***<br><br>An organisational world made up of different perspectives.<br><br>Staff and organisational interests can be aligned through understanding each other and through a focus on people over processes and profit. | **Becoming a team leader and re-negotiating relationships**<br><br>Potter mediates tensions between staff and organisational interests through a personal concern for people. Their story of becoming a team leader focuses on developing new relationships with the team and assuring them of their continuing concern for them. Potter constructs a new role as member of the team but one who bridges the team and the organisation and reminds the team of the organisational perspective and direction. | **The Team's Leader**<br><br>Remaining a member of the team but acting as a bridge to the wider organisation - leading from the front. |
| **Reed**<br><br>Service manager | **External**<br><br>***Being a business vs social responsibilities***<br><br>Natural tensions between being a business and a social landlord.<br><br>Tensions between internal and external in terms of their own work - where should their focus now be as a manager? Reflected in what the organisation should be - a business but reflecting values of community development. | **Organising a community event**<br>***Becoming a manager***<br><br>Organising the community event demonstrates Reed's commitment to social responsibility and services for customers, but primarily demonstrates Reed's managerial; skills and commitment to the organisation's values. Reed constructs a relationship with their team as one who can bring organisational expertise to inform the activities of the team, that is, a new kind of expertise. | **The Organisational Manager**<br><br>One who understands the organisational context and the wider business needs on behalf of the team. Securing the team's position within the organisation. |
| **Shaw**<br><br>Operations director | **Vertical**<br><br>***Organisational interests vs individual interests***<br><br>Business and individual interests both need to be balanced. The organisation is both planned (controlled) and emergent (complex).<br><br>The organisation as a complex social world - with multiple dimensions which need to be accounted for. | **Helping two managers to work together**<br>**Defending a team to executive directors**<br><br>Shaw themselves reflected that both stories represent the unexpected: the need to get involved in the detailed operational running of a service because two managers were struggling to work together; and the unexpected opportunity to cement positive relationships with a team by publically defending them. The stories position Shaw as having a concern for both organisational and business interests, and seeking to mediate them through developing personal relationships. | **The Relationship Manager**<br><br>Achieving organisational aims through personal relationships with people. |

**Table 7 – Manager narrative positioning within organisational world – detailed /continued**

| Manager | Key dimension | Narrative path | Mediating position |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Taylor**<br><br>Service manager | **Internal**<br><br>***Performance vs meaning***<br><br>An organisational world made up of different perspectives. Organisational members and stakeholders have shared interests but sometimes cannot see it. Tensions within the organisation are perceptual - they can be resolved through the right understanding and re-framing. | **Reforming their service area**<br><br>Taylor's reform of their service area is achieved through re-inscribing their team's organisational role: as a general service they provide a holistic service to customers and therefore taking work that other services cannot is a sign of their value. Similarly Taylor re-inscribes the meaning of performance, which should not just be about data but the impact on customers and the challenges that the team have overcome to achieve it. | **The Embodied Manager**<br><br>Leading through personal example, demonstrating a new way of working and being. |
| **Varley**<br><br>Team leader | **Vertical**<br><br>***Manager decision making vs staff practice***<br><br>An organisation made up of inherently competing perspectives and interests between senior managers and operational staff.<br><br>Tension is strongly vertical and the fault is located with managers who make decisions without understanding or recognising staff needs or experience, or Varley's expertise. | **Recruiting a promising but inexperienced candidate**<br>**Helping a sick staff member**<br>***Defending the team against management decisions***<br><br>A common thread in all Varley's stories is how they draw on personal experience and expertise to judge appropriate action and which battles should be fought: from supporting an inexperienced but talented candidate (and being proved right) to doing the right thing in assisting a sick staff member (despite organisational consequences) to determining which senior manager decisions need action on behalf of the team. | **Defender of the team**<br><br>Based on expertise. Judging between team and organisational claims, picking the right battles, judging between the prescribed thing and the right thing. |
| **Woods**<br><br>Team leader | **Vertical**<br><br>***Organisational objectives vs staff interests***<br><br>An organisation made up of potentially competing interests of organisational needs and staff personal needs – manifested in maintaining the service rota. An organisation based on rules which may be bent or enforced. | **Managing the staff rota**<br>***Becoming a manager***<br><br>The staff rota illustrates how Woods mediates between staff and organisational interests. Woods is willing to allow staff small favours on the understanding that they are able to return them when the rota is short but enforces rules such as holiday entitlement. Woods demonstrates their managerial skills by delivering organisational objectives through a full rota, and retains social capital with their staff. | **The Bamboo manager**<br><br>Balancing organisational and staff interests through complex web of small favours - within clear boundaries. |

| Organisational construction | Mediating position |
|---|---|
| **Vertical tensions** | |
| Fleming – Senior manager expectations vs staff capacity to deliver | The 'insulator' – keeping pressures of top and bottom apart through personal confidence |
| Varley – Manager decision making vs staff practice | The 'defender of the team' |
| Woods – Organisational objectives vs staff interests | The 'bamboo manager' – flexing between interests |
| Oakley - Organisational perspective vs staff perspective | The 'learning manager' – developing manager skills |
| Potter – Organisational perspective vs staff perspective | The 'team's leader' – leading from the front |
| Shaw – Organisational interests vs individual interests | The 'relationship manager' |
| **Horizontal tensions** | |
| Irwin– An organisation made up of specialisms | The 'expert manager' – providing cover for other teams, crossing boundaries |
| Jennings – An organisation of services competing for recognition and resources | The 'practitioner-manager' – promoting the value of their service to the organisation |
| Abbott – An organisation of multiple personal and managerial responsibilities | The 'adaptive manager' – creatively sustaining tensions, adapting to different demands |
| **External tensions** | |
| Bailey – Organisational intentions for customers vs unintended outcomes | The 'practitioner-manager' – managing a team of experts to meet customer needs |
| Newton – Organisational intentions for customers vs unintended outcomes | The 'practitioner manager' – aligning organisational vision and practice through expertise |
| Hancock – Being a business vs social responsibilities | The 'professional manager' – involving tenants by professionalising them |
| Reed – Being a business vs social responsibilities | The 'organisational manager' – positioning the team |
| Dawson – Business interests vs customer interests | The 'helper' – supporting team members |
| Everett – Business interests vs customer interests | The 'leader' – achieving business and customer goals through people |
| **Internal tensions** | |
| Chapman – Old ways vs new ways | The 'embodied manager' – personally responsible for creating the service |
| Long – Old ways vs new ways | The 'manager-practitioner' – subordinating practitioner identity to evolving manager role |
| Goddard – Experience and expertise vs change and development | The 'developing manager' – blending experience with willingness to develop |
| Kendall – Organisational needs vs organisational member roles | The 'deliverer' – one who does what is asked |
| Miller – Organisational talk vs organisational practice | The 'outsider manager' – who sees and knows better |
| Taylor – Performance vs meaning | The 'embodied manager' – leading by personal example |

**Figure 12 – Medial manager narrative positioning within organisational worlds – summary**

Second, although managers may construct the organisation across similar tensions, they interpret the nature of such tensions differently, and respond to such tensions in different ways. This may be illustrated by considering the six managers who

constructed the organisation along vertical tensions between top and bottom. Three managers, Oakley, Potter and Shaw, constructed manager roles which are based on reconciling organisational and staff interests through their managerial practice; for example, Potter constructs themselves as the 'team's leader' who is still a member of the team, but one who bridges the team and the organisation and helps to lead the team in the organisation's direction. Although these managers construct the organisation along a vertical tension their management practice is predicated upon the assumption that it can be managed and resolved: "you try to get the best for the staff, you try to get the best out of the staff" (Oakley, team leader). In contrast, Fleming, Varley and Woods constructed such vertical tensions as inherent and needing to be managed through protecting staff from organisational pressures. However, these latter three also described different personal interpretations of such a role. Fleming seeks to "insulate" staff and senior managers from each other through each having personal confidence in Fleming as a competent manager who is fully in control of their service area. Woods describes their role as flexing between staff and organisational interests by determining when they can "bend like bamboo" and when they need to enforce organisational policy; and Varley constructs themselves as the defender and representative of their team, whose role is to make their case to senior managers. Similarly, three managers construct an organisational position which is characterised as a 'practitioner-manager', but these are enacted in different ways in response to different organisational constructs. Jennings' response is to be a manager drawing on their practitioner expertise to promote their service in an organisation where services compete for attention and resources (horizontal tensions), while Bailey draws on their expertise to direct and support their team to effectively meet customer need (an external organisational construction). Newton similarly responds to an external organisational construction, but their expertise is utilised to enable their staff to better align their (external) practice with organisational values.

The purpose of this stage of analysis has been *to uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles* (research objective 3). By using a method of story elicitation, and then applying narrative and paradigmatic analysis to both the chosen stories and wider interview texts, the analysis has demonstrated an original and effective way of

gaining insight into the individual ways in which managers understand and make personal sense of their organisational position. Analysis has revealed the twenty one medial managers at Panorama to be constructing (within the context of an interview) both a range of nuanced personal social worlds and a similarly nuanced and wide range of responses to such organisational worlds, through their chosen stories and their personal storytelling. The research has successfully achieved its aim of gaining rich and detailed insight into the ways in which medial managers understand and interpret their organisational position without deliberate prior framing or reference to research conceptualisation of medial managers. Having established the individual ways in which managers understand their organisational position in their own words (albeit interpreted and reported by the researcher) the research will only now start to operationalise the research conceptualisation of the medial manager and medial manager identity.

## 6.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the first two stages of data analysis: the discursive context of the case study organisation, Panorama Housing; and the self-presentations of medial managers in interviews. Stage 1 has identified the subjectivities impinging on medial managers within the context of Panorama Housing, and the possible discursive resources available to medial managers. Three key themes have been established as central to Panorama Housing: being a business, underpinned by discourses of commercial business, customers, financial efficiency and professional managers; being the best, underpinned by discourses of achievement, continuous improvement and being different; and having a shared moral purpose, supported by discourses of social responsibility and collective engagement. Stage 2 has presented a detailed narrative and paradigmatic analysis of medial manager stories elicited through interviews. Drawing on a narrative and mythical conceptualisation of identity, the chapter has demonstrated how such analysis offers a powerful way of investigating the ways in which medial managers may understand and seek to present themselves in their organisational roles. The stories that medial managers tell about themselves, and stories interpreted by reading their interview texts as narrative, both inform and set up a personal social world based on oppositions and also establish a personal position within that social world. Analysis has not only revealed the wide range of nuanced personal self-presentations, but identified the

range of narrative identity work undertaken by medial managers through plot and role, and through selectively constructing an organisational landscape.

Having used the method of story elicitation and mythical analysis to identify the personal ways in which medial managers understand and seek to present themselves and their organisational roles, the next chapter starts to contextualise these self-presentations and narrative processes of identity work within the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity. Specifically, the intention of the next chapter is to determine the extent to which the conceptualisation of medial manager identity usefully reflects and interprets the personal experience of medial managers at Panorama.

# Chapter 7 – Medial manager stories: organisational positioning

## 7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of stage 3 of the analytical process. Having presented the discursive context of Panorama Housing, having presented a narrative and paradigmatic analysis of medial manager stories, and having identified the individual self-presentations of each medial manager and the personal meanings of their organisational role expressed through such self-presentations, the third stage of analysis starts to further contextualise the medial manager stories in terms of organisational position, by examining the range of discursive subject positions for medial managers in Panorama Housing, their responses to such subject positions, and the ways in which they position themselves, including the ways in which managers use key organisational discourses identified and discussed in section 6.2. In doing so it addresses research objective 4: *To understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims;* and starts to address research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.*

The chapter draws directly on the conceptualisation of the medial manager developed and presented in chapter 3. Building on the definition of a medial manager as any manager who is both directly managed and who directly manages others, chapter 3 argued that such managers are hierarchically and functionally positioned 'in-between' the organisation and the employees and services that they manage, and may be required to negotiate or buffer tensions between competing interests and expectations. Drawing on Alvesson and Wllmott's (2002) model of identity as the dynamic interaction between self-identity and identity regulation through identity work, the chapter further proposed two dimensions of medial manager identity. First, the meaning and role of a medial manager is not straightforward or obvious, but subject to multiple demands and expectations from multiple constituents, including executive and senior managers, staff, peers, customers and external stakeholders including professions. Social identity theory in

particular highlights the multiple possible identifications available to a medial manager as a direct result of their organisational position 'in-between' and the multiple ways in which to 'be' and to act as a medial manager. Second, such multiple and possible identifications, and the contradictions inherent in the medial manager position, to be both an independent agent and loyal subject, and to draw on their operational experience to contribute towards executive intentions but only in prescribed ways, afford the medial manager some scope for agency in managing, sustaining or selecting between multiple and conflicting discourses and subject positions. Management as an identity project (Andersson, 2010; Warhurst, 2011; Watson, 2001) may therefore be understood not simply as growing in maturity into an organisational role, but as making personal sense of a complex and contingent role which is subject to multiple and competing demands, expectations and discourses.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section analyses the nature of the discursive environment in the context of the medial manager, and identifies the possible subject positions, or possible identifications, for medial managers in Panorama. Having set out the possible subject positions the section then examines which positions, or possible identifications, medial managers recognise in their texts, and analyses the various tactics (Corbett-Etchevers & Mounoud, 2011; De Certeau, 1984; Du Gay, 1996a) employed in order to manage multiple and sometimes contested discourses and subject positions. The second section presents the analysis of medial manager texts in terms of characterising different types of responses to the possible subject positions available to and impinging on medial mangers. The section characterises a range of different responses, or 'ways of being a manager', and discusses how these responses to different subject positions are reflected in both the stories the medial managers told, and their identified tactics for managing multiple possible subject positions. In this way, the presented analysis both explores the validity of the research conceptualisation of manager identity as a surface picture of manager experience, and also starts to examine some of the undercurrents of processes which form that surface picture (Ashforth, et al., 2008).

## 7.2 Medial manager identity work – responses to subject positions

This section presents the first part of the third stage of the analytical process set out in chapter 5.4.2.

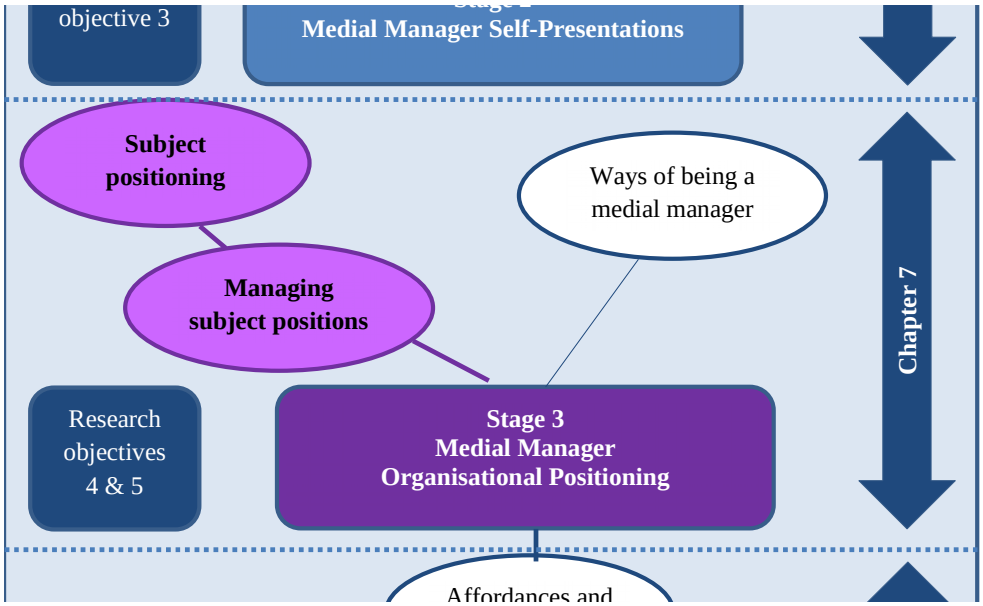


**Figure 13 – Position of analysis of medial manager subject positions within the analytical process**

The research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (section 3.5) proposes that medial managers may be conceptualised in terms of multiple possible identifications, and particularly with the organisation and with their staff, team or service including profession. This section investigates and analyses the nature of these identifications for medial managers in the context of Panorama Housing. First, thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010) of the medial manager interview texts is presented in order to identify the possible subject positions and identifications available to and impinging on medial managers in Panorama Housing, and the nature of those subject positions. Second, the section presents analysis of medial manager responses: which subject positions each manager recognises in their texts; how multiple subject positions are managed; which subject positions are contested and how. In doing so the analysis examines the ways in which identity work is undertaken in the context of the medial manager position: the ways in which managers utilise, re-work or reject discursive resources available to them, and the ways in which key organisational discourses discussed in section 6.2 are used.

### 7.2.1 Possible subject positions

Section 6.2 set out the organisational and discursive context of Panorama Housing. It identified three prominent themes of being a business, comprising key discourses of customers, financial responsibility and managers as professionals and leaders; being the best, comprising discourses of continuous improvement, performance and achievement; and a shared moral purpose, including discourses of social responsibility and collective responsibility. This section examines the ways in which Panorama managers respond to their organisational position 'in-between' in the particular discursive context of Panorama, and the particular ways in which Panorama seeks to construct organisational members and managers.

Following the analytical process set out in section 5.4.3 the manager interview texts were coded and analysed in order to identify the possible subject positions within the organisational context of Panorama Housing. Three categories of subject position were identified across manager texts: to be a manager in the service of the organisation; to be a practitioner; and to be a member of the team or service area. However, the ways in which managers recognised and interpreted these subject positions varied significantly. Figure 14 summarises these subject positions and the ways and extent to which they are reflected in manager texts, while figure 15 summarises which subject positions are recognised, in various ways and to varying degrees, by each medial manager.

All twenty one medial manager texts included some reference to organisational expectations on them to act as managers in the service of the organisation, but managers recognised and interpreted these expectations in a variety of ways (figure 14). These may be broadly categorised as operational delivery and to be a representative of the organisation.


**Figure 14 – Possible subject positions of medial managers**

A majority of managers (fourteen) made specific reference during their interview to their role in delivering or contributing towards organisational objectives and targets, which might be expected given Panorama Housing's emphasis on performance management ('be the best'). However, managers also reflected alternative

constructions of operational delivery. A number (Abbott, Fleming, Hancock, Irwin, Jennings, Kendall and Varley) emphasised their role in providing operational expertise within their service area: their role is to be "a very operational manager, very hands on" (Abbott, service manager), who is able to work without being "micromanaged" (Kendall, team leader) and whose own manager is able to adopt an "arms-length management style" (Jennings, service manager) and trust them to know their services (Fleming, Irwin, Woods). Everett constructed their role in terms of loyalty to the business and ensuring its interests through strategic oversight, while Dawson, Long and Shaw emphasised the manager role as supporting others to fulfil organisational objectives and performance targets. However, while Shaw was explicit about their responsibility to ensure that staff are competent to fulfil their tasks and targets, Dawson and Long focused more on identifying valid reasons why staff might not be able to fulfil them:

> *Your role is to find out [ ] why, and then support that individual. It may well be because they've been drawn into other things...it's...to find out what the issues may be, what problems that's led to - and then looking at ways we can look at it and refine it a different way, different ideas, different methods of doing things. So it's not just for me, it's as a team I think, we bring <u>them</u> in as well, get <u>their</u> ideas, <u>their</u> knowledge base.* – Dawson, team leader

A smaller number of manager texts recognised an aspect of being a manager in the service of the organisation as being a representative of the organisation. Abbott, Everett, Hancock and Newton referred to an obligation on them as managers to promote organisational values to their staff:

> *The visions and values of the organisation are - it's very im<u>portant</u> to this organisation that people <u>work</u> to them and believe in them and they are - you know that you can see them shining through what people do on a daily basis. So, it <u>is</u> important to me as a manager here to make sure that people are - enjoy working here, and want, for the better good of themselves and the organisation and the customers*. – Abbott, service manager

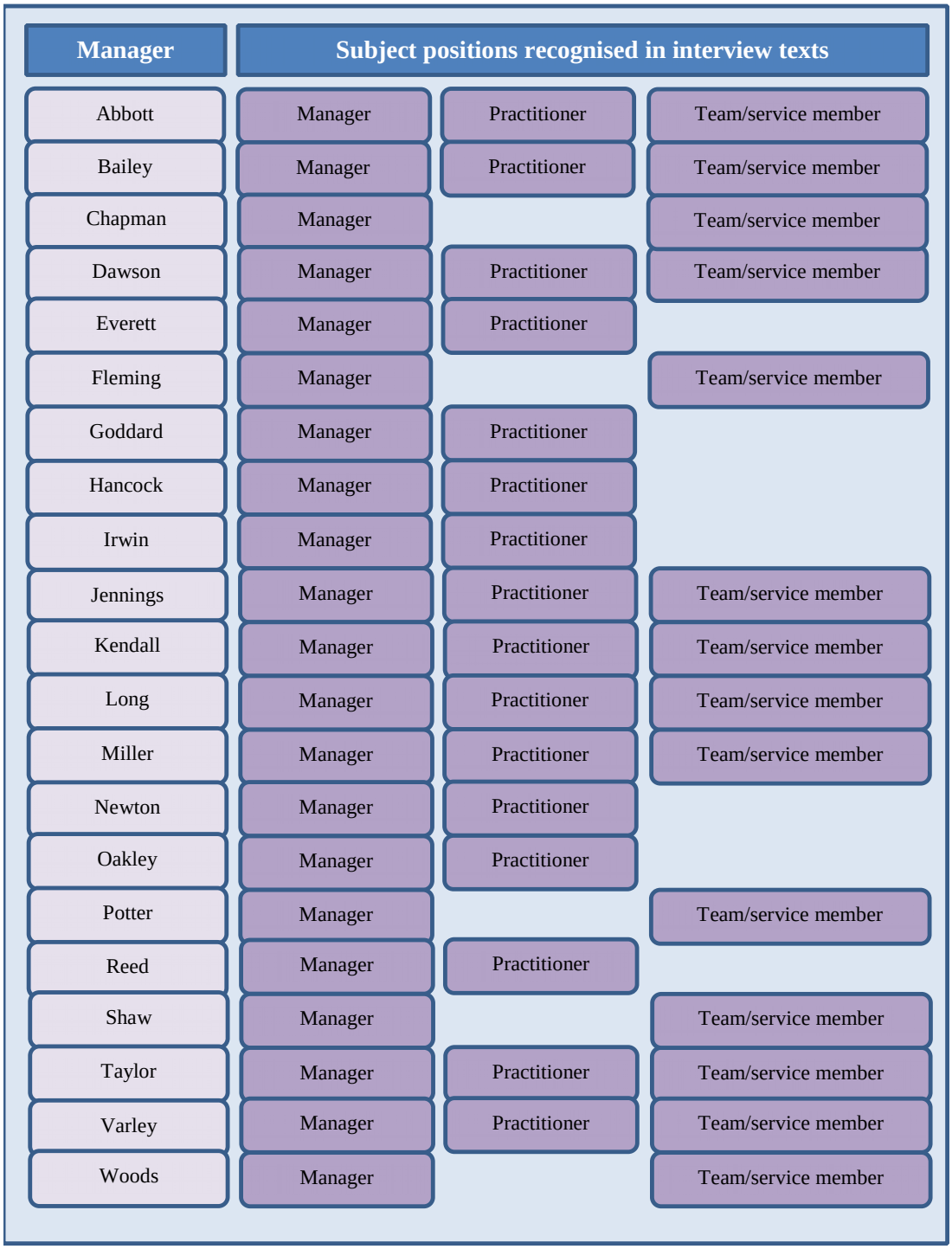


**Figure 15 – Possible subject positions by medial manager**

Reed and Shaw also referred to such obligations and described seeking to incorporate organisational values into their own managerial practice, such as supporting family friendly policies (Shaw). Finally some manager texts (Goddard, Kendall, Long, Oakley, Potter and Woods) directly recognised an obligation on the manager to physically represent, or embody the organisation to staff and to be the

deliverer and implementer of organisational messages and decisions. Potter's story of becoming a team leader involved negotiating the new relationship with their team and making clear their responsibilities towards the organisation: "I will say I am your friend but, as your team leader I need to say to you, this, what's your response?" (Potter, team leader).

A second possible position reflected in manager texts is that of a practitioner. A number of manager texts (Bailey, Dawson, Everett, Hancock, Jennings, Newton, Reed, Taylor) position the manager as sensitive to the needs – often un-met – of customers and the obligations of the manager and/or the organisation to respond to those needs. Expertise can provide critical insight into understanding customer needs and service delivery (Bailey, Miller, Newton): "I know the people who I work with and the team that I manage work with people who are struggling, have got support needs...everything isn't black and white" (Bailey, service manager). Expertise is also commonly referred to as being essential for managing and supporting staff (Bailey, Goddard, Irwin, Jennings, Miller, Newton, Oakley, Reed, Varley) both in being able to provide guidance and in being able to give confidence to the team. A number of managers described their level of experience and expertise as something that they draw on: "I know the issues that they face, I know the difficulties, I know the challenges and I can hopefully then use that experience to put...things in place to make it easier, make it better" (Goddard, team leader). For others, a perceived lack of expertise was something that has to be gained in order to justify their role or to be compensated for:

> *I'm never going to know more than them or have the same experience as them...I just kind of look at it as a business perspective, you know, what are the outcomes going to be, why would we do this, how would it impact on the business, how will they impact on the team, how will they impact on the customer.* – Reed, service manager

A third possible subject position is to be a member of the team or service. The stories told by a number of managers incorporate a significant element of supporting and looking after team members: maintaining close working relationships with them (Potter, Woods), supporting them when they feel isolated or unappreciated (Abbott, Taylor), identifying with them as fellow practitioners (Dawson, Jennings, Long) and

recognising that they may have different needs and interests to those of the organisation: “at the end of the day they are [an officer]...they never signed up...for that level of responsibility” (Kendall, team leader). This may also extend to protecting staff from the demands, pressures and decisions of senior managers (Fleming, Kendall, Miller, Varley). Kendall explained that they might undertake a task themselves rather than force an unwilling staff member to do it, and Varley describes themselves as the “first port of call” who picks up concerns from staff, and needs to judge which should be taken up:

> *’Cause I can’t fight every individual thing because the chain of command goes up quite a way, so...I’ll pick the key issues that are affecting people and...I’ll concentrate on trying to move them.* – Varley, Team Leader

### 7.2.2 Responses to possible subject positions

The twenty one medial manager texts recognise a range of possible subject positions and all recognise more than one possible subject position or identification within the organisation. This section starts to analyse the ways in which managers managed possible subject positions and identifications within the context of self-presentations within an interview: that is, what kinds of identity work do they undertake in order to incorporate, negotiate, adapt or reject possible subject positions and possible roles and obligations into their personal self-identities (Davies & Harre, 1990; Simpson & Carroll, 2008; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008; Stryker & Burke, 2000)? As described in section 5.4.3 the analysis identified two key orders of identity work: the management of multiple possible subject positions, and the management of contested subject positions.

### 7.2.3 Managing multiple subject positions

As described in section 5.4.3 the analysis applied an adapted version of Roccas and Brewer’s (2002) model of alternative structures of multiple ingroup representations. (It should be noted that Roccas and Brewer propose their model from a social identity theory perspective, and so some interpretations of each tactic differ to their original.) This proposes a continuum from simple cognitive schemas based on commonalities to more complex schemas based on integrating difference, and identifies four tactics: intersection, dominance, compartmentalisation and merger.

The tactics and manager responses are summarised in figure 16, which also details which subject positions managers are responding to in relation to the tactic.

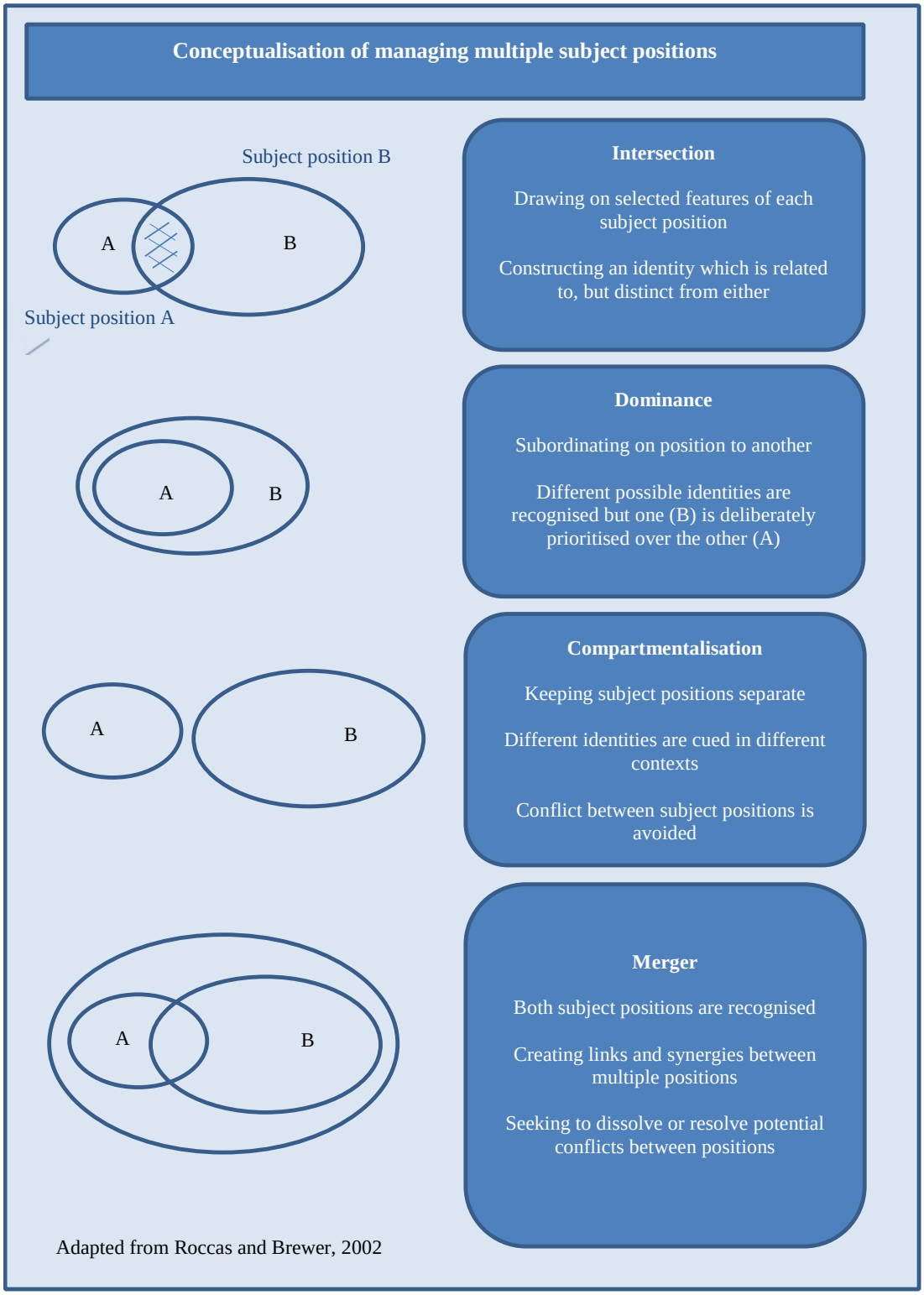


**Figure 16 – Typology of tactics for managing multiple subject positions**

An intersection tactic involves drawing on selected features of different subject positions to construct one which is distinct from either. (This differs somewhat to Roccas and Brewer's original meaning of this as constructing an in-group based on membership of two groups). Goddard and Irwin both manage claims to be part of their team and claims to be organisational managers by constructing organisational positions which are explicitly distinct from either their teams or their own manager: for example Goddard draws on discourses of expertise to contrast themselves against their "strategic" manager, but also on discourses of growth and development to position themselves against their team who are over-reliant on "how we've always done it". Bailey constructs a very particular management role as the manager of a team of expert practitioners. Unlike other managers who adopt merger strategies which seek to bring different organisational roles together, Bailey constructs an identity based on being "slightly different" to the rest of the organisation and managing a different team who all share Bailey's commitment to the value-meaning of their practice. Bailey describes undertaking manager functions but these are specific to service delivery, and potential conflicts between what staff want and what the organisation will do are framed in terms of staff concern for practice.

Dominance happens when individuals recognise different possible subject positions, but choose one primary subject position to which others are subordinated. Varley recognises organisational expectations on them, such as managing staff performance and absences, and to implement organisational decisions and to "toe the party line". They also recognise staff expectations to listen to dissatisfaction and disagreement with organisational decisions and to "stand up for them". Varley chooses to prioritise their position as the defender and representative of their team whose role is to take up issues where there is sufficient demand from the team: "I'm going to sort of fight this...I don't...necessarily follow the party line because, you know, there's a strength of feeling amongst the team" (Varley, team leader). Dawson and Kendall are less explicit but can be seen to subordinate their manager role to practitioner roles. Both tell stories in which they act as experts, Kendall in configuring a system and Dawson in supporting their team to assist customers; and both are explicit in stating that their practice gives most meaning to their job: "I think at the end of the day, it's that you're helping a customer who's struggled, and been denied something which you know, you've gone and helped them" (Dawson, team leader). In contrast,

Oakley responds to a perceived lack of experience and expertise in their service area by subordinating their practitioner identity in favour of a managerial identity which is based on a willingness to gain formal management learning and demonstrate competence in organisational expectations of managers such as engaging staff.

A compartmentalisation tactic involves retaining multiple subject positions but keeping them separate without attempting to integrate them or resolve any tensions or conflicts between them: that is, switching from one to another depending on the circumstances. Woods provides a particularly clear example of compartmentalisation as means of managing tensions between organisational and staff interests by creatively and opportunistically playing up or down their manager role, on the one hand being flexible and exchanging small favours in order to maintain service delivery where possible – "It's not that you've got to accommodate but if you can help them...if I ruled it with a stick, you wouldn't get your way with them" – but then relying on their manager position to enforce organisational decisions where necessary: "but you go [ ] yeah, what would you do? And they go, fair enough. You know, you spin it back round to them and say yeah, you know, you [do this job], what would you do?" Long's text refers to both practitioner and manager roles, but as separate activities, and their discussion of each is cued by talk of gaining recognition through a Quality Mark and following their manager's example in managing performance and attendance respectively. Similarly, Chapman's text holds in sustained tension their personal vision of their service area which they construct as both their personal responsibility and as informing and driving the organisation's own values, and their stated commitment to shared responsibility and team-working: "Obviously there are [ ] other managers as well as me, and we all work really well together. There is a lot of collaborative working...we all work really well together, it's a very strong team." Compartmentalisation can also be cognitive. As previously noted, Miller draws on their personal experience and insight in order to critique the organisation and some of its objectives, but this critique appears to be kept separate from their practice and they describe no effort to convince the organisation of their perspective (beyond their claims for a higher pay grade).

A merger tactic involves acknowledging multiple subject positions and seeking to create links and synergies between them. In contrast to an intersection strategy

which constructs an identity which draws on but is separate from either position, a merger aims to creatively blend multiple positions. For example, Potter's chosen story focuses on their transition from team member to team leader, and reflects potentially competing perspectives of organisational and staff interests. They construct a position characterised as the 'team's leader', in which Potter positions themselves as still a member of the team, but acting as a bridge to the wider organisation: they seek to bring their team with them rather than imposing organisational decisions, and help team members to see the wider team and organisational perspective beyond their individual needs. This identity is underpinned by the claim that organisational objectives can be met through a personal relationship with staff and attending to their interests and needs:

> *I've tried to take the team on the journey with me, rather than being, well I've got where I want to be now, I'm not bothered about anybody else. They knew that I got to where I wanted to be because I was bothered about them.* – Potter, team leader

Newton similarly seeks to blend practitioner and manager roles by drawing on their experience and expert insight to both shape the organisation's service delivery to customers, and to integrate the organisation's vision and values with their team's daily practice: "It's about trying to represent that, appropriately, it's about modelling the values, I guess...what does it mean in [our service area] to be <u>enterprising</u>?" (Newton, team leader).

### 7.2.4 Managing contested subject positions

Tactics for managing multiple subject positions highlight the different ways in which managers respond to possible identity claims. However, as noted in section 5.4.3, one particular feature which emerged from the data, namely the ways in which medial managers *contested* certain subject positions, rather than finding different forms of accommodation, required further analysis. This section therefore further examines the identity work undertaken by those mangers by analysing the different ways in which they respond to contested subject positions and discourses. The analysis has developed a further typology of tactics, which should be seen as a sub-set of the tactics for managing multiple subject positions (section 7.2.3). The typology conceptualises these tactics as a continuum based on the extent to which

the individual engages with a contested subject position or discourse, from separating oneself to submitting to it. The typology and manager responses is summarised in figure 17.

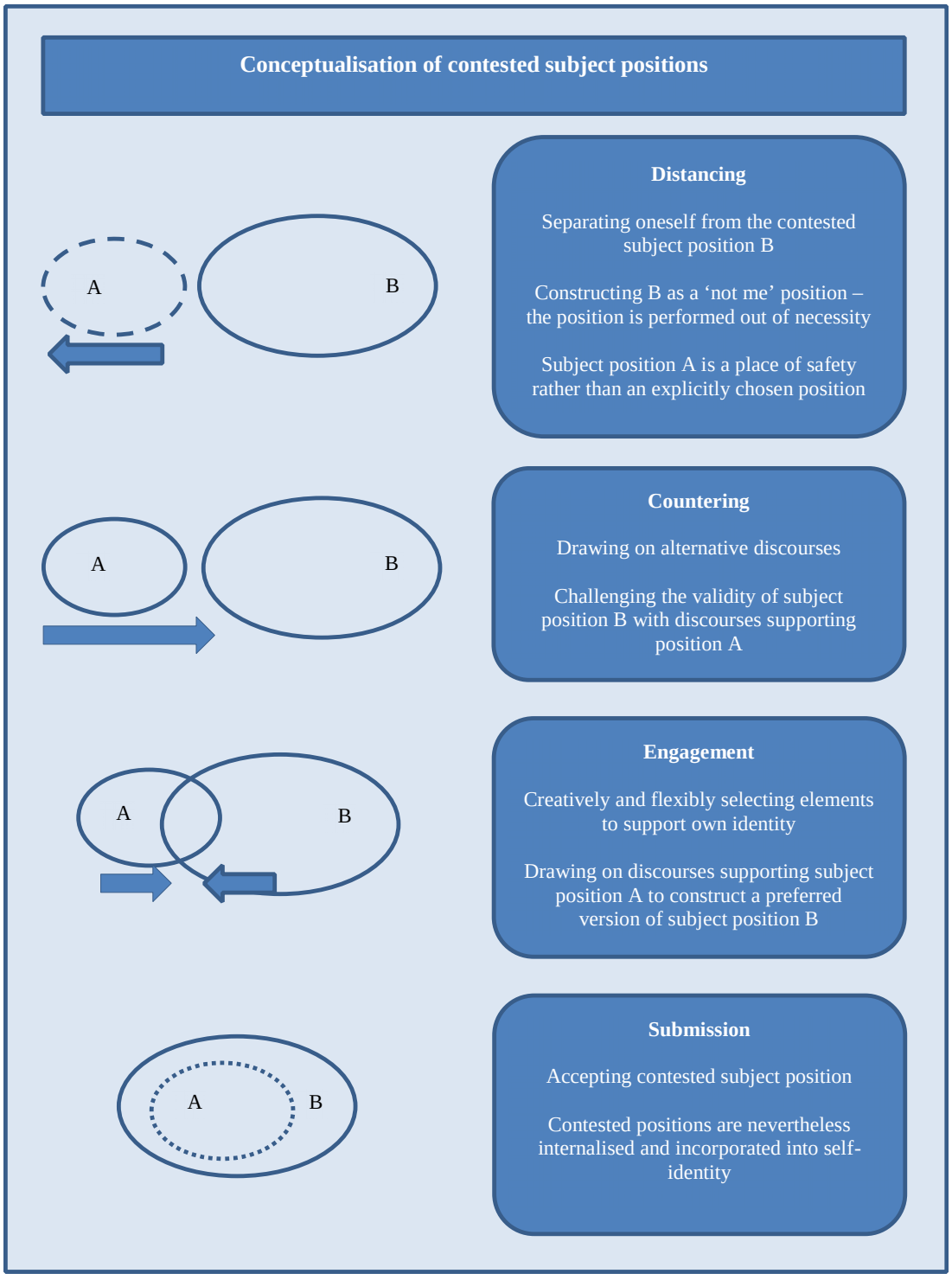


**Figure 17 – Typology of tactics for contesting subject positions**

Distancing involves separating oneself from the contested subject position through constructing it as an anti-identity or 'not me' position (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), which is performed out of necessity, as opposed to the 'real me' (Collinson, 2006; Costas & Fleming, 2009; Musson & Duberley, 2007). Kendall offers a particular example of a distancing tactic. The previous sections (7.2.1, 7.2.3) noted how Kendall recognises the demands of the needs and interests of their team, and how they subordinate their managerial role by privileging their practitioner identity as a flexible expert; Kendall further responds to the organisational claims on them as a manager by cognitively and practically distancing themselves from the responsibilities of the role. Kendall distances themselves from unpopular decisions by making their personal opinions clear and not seeking to persuade staff where they do not agree with it themselves. By using the plural voice Kendall positions themselves with staff rather than with the organisation: "this is what we've been told to do", and distances themselves from the organisational role which they are required to fulfil: "I have to pass [it] down and say...we have to do it". Kendall further uses distancing tactics by drawing on the organisational hierarchy and constructing clear divisions of responsibility. It is not appropriate for Kendall to make staff undertake additional roles which they do not want to do if they do not relate to their specific job role: "At the end of the day they are [an officer]...they never signed up...for that level of responsibility". Kendall similarly constructs a clear division of responsibility between them and their manager. Kendall's role is to identity and report problems, drawing on their practitioner expertise; it is Kendall's manager's responsibility to decide how problems will be resolved and to instruct Kendall accordingly. Kendall is thus able to prioritise the interests and demands of their staff and maintain positive working relationships.

A countering tactic involves contesting subject positions and discourses by drawing on alternative ones. Several managers construct their own versions of being a manager. For example, Dawson draws on a range of other organisational discourses in order to counter organisational claims of managerial responsibility. Discourses of being a commercial business and of customer focus validate Dawson's privileging their practitioner role in supporting staff to assist customers because helping customers helps the business to collect rental income which helps improve services: "so I think you have...a dual responsibility, whether it's your customer but also for a

business that helps the customer". Moreover, Dawson constructs the whole organisation as collectively working towards this aim along with their own team (that is, discourses of 'shared moral purpose'): they work "hand in hand" with other teams and help other teams to learn and develop, and to be able to identify and refer problems to Dawson's team. Dawson's interview text avoids (despite some probing) any significant construction of themselves as a manager in terms of making or enforcing decisions, enforcing standards or acting with any disciplinary authority. Instead, Dawson draws on discourses of staff development, staff engagement and teamworking to construct a role in which managerial responsibility is to involve team members in service delivery and decision making:

> *So it's not just for me, it's as a team I think, we bring <u>them</u> in as well, get <u>their</u> ideas, <u>their</u> knowledge base... I think, like, <u>all</u> the time your team's got to be part of - you might be a manager but you have to include your team in ideas...And I think that's part of being part of a team, and as a <u>manager</u>* – Dawson, team leader

By utilising discourses of staff engagement Dawson is able to construct a version of their managerial role which is focused on supporting and developing staff rather than challenging them; and by constructing the team and the wider organisation as wholly aligned with the aims of helping customers they undercut the need for any directional or disciplinary managerial role: there is no need for Dawson to be anything other than a senior practitioner.

Engagement involves individuals creatively and flexibly selecting elements of contested discourses to support their own identity constructions. Jennings provides an example of this, which also highlights the key difference between an engagement and a countering strategy: unlike countering managers Jennings does not seek to offer a direct alternative identity, but creatively constructs and enacts their own version. Jennings primarily presents themselves as a practitioner, and draws on selected elements of a managerial identity in order to construct a particular Practitioner-Manager identity on their own terms. A key theme of Jennings' interview text is the tension between Panorama as a commercial business and its commitment to social responsibility, and that social activities are regarded by some senior managers as "the fluffy stuff" compared to hard commercial concerns of

business sustainability; and Jennings presents their service area as an essential means of mediating that tension: “the work we do is valuable...which means that impacts on your business, so you should be grateful (laughs)”. In this context Jennings constructs a manager role which is based on building up their service area in the service of the organisation and making the case for its value. Jennings constructs the organisation as a collection of competing services and refers to “a constant battle, in-house” in order to make their case. Their role as a manager is to demonstrate how the service fulfils organisational aims and values: “selling [ ] the service, I suppose and selling the benefits of it, you know, [ ] it’s a constant thing but in this day and age you have to prove your worth”. Success as a manager means being trusted with additional resources and gaining recognition from other service areas from “those that interact with us and just have more of a knowledge”. Jennings’ constructed manager role as a service promoter is dependent on their personal expertise which is not shared by others – “it’s a complex area” – and this expertise also informs how Jennings manages their staff. They provide support and direction and “and throw it about a bit more” if staff are struggling, but Jennings also encourages staff to propose their own ideas and validates good ones: “quite often they just come back going what do you think about this and I’m like - brilliant, off you go!” (Jennings retains a role in validating and authorising staff ideas in contrast to Dawson, in whose text staff are cast as equal participants in a democratic process.) Jennings’ use of a distancing strategy, which prioritises personal relationships with the staff over some staff decisions, reinforces this construction of a manager whose primary responsibility is for developing their service area according to their personal vision.

Finally, submission occurs when individuals accept contested subject positions. This is distinct from distancing, where individuals may perform required roles but do not internalise them and incorporate them into their self-identities. Two managers, Hancock and Long, offer examples of submission, which also highlight the extent to which the strategy may be a passive or unconscious one (C. Casey, 1995). Long’s text constructs a tension between managerial and practitioner identities. Section 7.2.3 noted how Long adopts a compartmentalisation strategy in which different identities are cued by different activities and demands. However, read as a whole, Long’s text suggests that they are in the process of submitting to a managerial identity by presenting themselves as willingly adapting to the changing demands of

the organisation and demonstrating their loyalty in recognising changes as improvements. For example they now conduct performance reviews with staff: "I didn't do that two years ago...I wouldn't have had those conversations...but because [my manager's] asking me I've got the confidence". At one point during the interview Long reflected on the tension between benefits for practice of being based in the community, and organisational benefits of being centrally based. Without fully answering or resolving the tension, because there are benefits on each side (and much of Long's text is rooted in descriptions of practice, not least their chosen story of achieving a Quality Mark through working in the community) Long concludes that the organisation's decision is correct:

> *The disadvantage is that you lose a little bit of local knowledge... you did have that local contact. But as I say from a performance point of view it's absolutely fantastic. You haven't got [ ] dispersed teams but then you have communication issues then, don't you and travel issues and overheads to pay and all those sort of stuff, don't you as well. So I actually enjoy – I enjoy it here and I think it is an improvement to actually be here, so.* – Long, team leader

### 7.2.5 Summary – responses to subject positions

Analysis of the subject positions recognised by managers, and their response to those subject positions highlights a number of key points. First, three key subject positions were recognised by managers across the twenty one interview texts: to be a manager in the service of the organisation, to be a practitioner concerned with operational delivery and customer outcomes, and to be a member of the team or service area. Moreover, all manager texts recognised at least two different subject positions, and nine made reference to all three; and in over half of manager texts some degree of contestation of subject positions were found. The findings therefore provide some support for the conceptualisation of the medial manager as being 'in-between' competing demands (e.g. Clarke, et al., 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Harding, et al., 2014; McConville & Holden, 1999; Sims, 2003; Watson, 1997) and as being responsible for and to multiple constituencies simultaneously (Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Sims, 2003), and further support for the interpretation of the extant literature that

these demands can be conceptualised as organisational, staff and/or practice demands (section 3.5).

Second, while the recognition of key organisational subject positions reflects some of the ways in which managers are constructed and constrained by the nature and context of their organisational position, the analysis also demonstrates the ways in which managers individually respond to such positionings. Managers interpreted similar subject positions in different ways: for example, being a manager at the service of the organisation was interpreted as being responsible for operational delivery by all managers, but this included a range of different aspects such as delivering business objectives, providing operational expertise and supporting others. Moreover, despite the clear message from the CEO and executive directors that managers should be "the authors of the message, not simple deliverers" (CEO, interview), there was limited reference to the particular management role of representing the organisation to staff amongst the manager interview texts. The range of different tactics identified for managing multiple or contested subject positions further reveals the very individual responses of managers to their organisational position, and the ways in which different subject positions are variously accepted, rejected, contested or adapted. In particular the analysis reveals how key Panorama discourses are differently utilised: as framing and determining the manager's own actions (e.g. Abbott, Newton); as a means of answering staff demands for technical expertise (Oakley, Reed); as a resource to selectively draw from (e.g. Jennings); or as a resource with which to counter other organisational discourses, as when Dawson draws on discourses of staff involvement and teamworking to answer any requirement for managerial responsibility or leadership. That is, the analysis reveals something of the ongoing struggle between organisational centripetal forces which seek to impose a unified and centralising meaning, and the centrifugal "heteroglossia" of multiple social groups putting language to their own use and constructing their own meanings (Bakhtin, 1935/1981/1994), and the limitations of centripetal organisational discourse. The analysis also shows how managers draw on alternative discursive resources, such as professional practice, previous experience or personal values, and how these may be used to align with and support organisational discourse (e.g. Everett, Newton, Potter) or to construct alternative positions.

Analysis of manager subject positions and their responses is therefore starting to reveal managers engaging – within the particular occasion of an interview – in multiple instances and forms of identity work in response to their organisational position; and that such forms of identity work are highly individual. That is, although managers recognise a broad "bundle of obligatory activity" (Goffman, 1961, p. 86) associated with their managerial role, the precise nature, meaning and value of these obligations remain ambiguous and contested, and open to individual improvisation (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). The following section further explores how managers make personal sense of their organisational roles within the context of multiple subject positions.

## 7.3 Medial manager identity work – ways of being a medial manager

This section presents the final part of the third stage of analytical process set out in chapter 5.4.2.

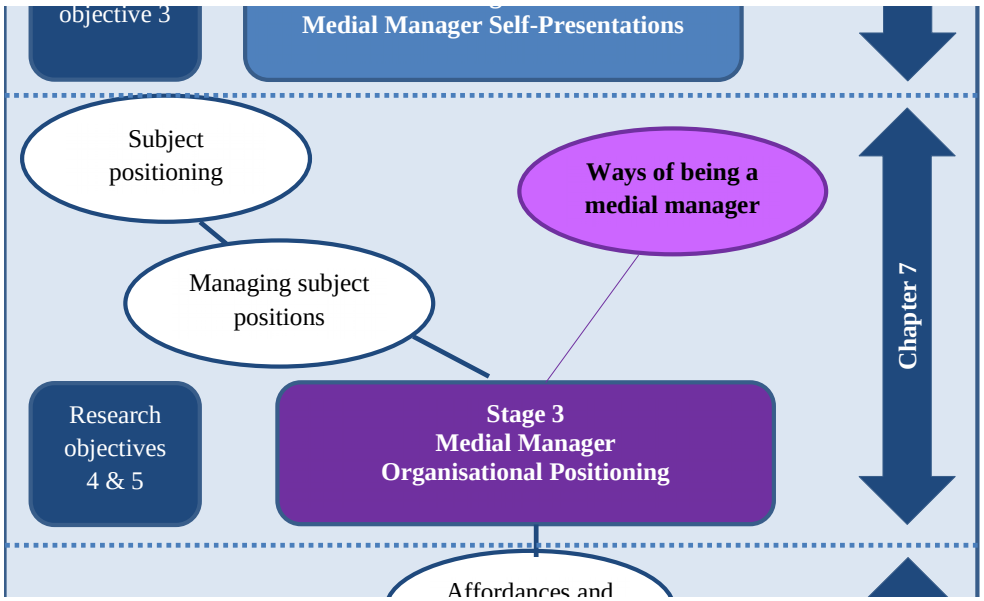


**Figure 18 – Position of analysis of medial manager positioning within the analytical process**

As described under section 5.4.3, in this stage the medial manager texts were read and analysed in terms of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity developed in section 3.5. The framework proposed two dimensions of medial manager identity: multiple possible identifications available to the medial manager as a consequence of their organisational position 'in-between'; and the degree of agency afforded medial managers by such multiple identifications and potentially

competing organisational interests to make individual responses. Having presented analysis of the different subject positions and possible identifications recognised by Panorama medial managers in their interview texts (section 7.2.1), and identified a range of tactics for managing multiple and contested subject positions (sections 7.2.2-3), this section presents the findings from the iterative analysis described in section 5.4.3 between the subject positions available to Panorama medial managers and their interview texts and chosen stories interpreted as self-presentations, in order to identify a range of possible ways of interpreting the medial manager's organisational position and 'ways of being a medial manager'.

### 7.3.1 Dimensions of medial manager identities

Analysis of medial manager interview texts identified three primary subject positions which were reflected in the texts: to be a manager in the service of the organisation; to be a practitioner; and to be a member of the staff team or service area (section 7.2.1). These three subject positions were therefore taken to represent the key possible identifications for Panorama medial managers. Analysis of the workplace identities constructed and presented by medial managers in their interview texts then focused on their responses to these three positions: the extent to which each was recognised and the ways in which each position, if recognised, was interpreted; the ways in which different subject positions were managed and contested; and the overall strength and significance of each subject position within the overall text. This analysis also incorporated the findings from the narrative and paradigmatic analysis of medial manager stories: the ways in which they constructed and positioned themselves and other organisational actors; and the ways in which their stories and texts read as narrative constructed a particular kind of organisational and social worlds, and positioned the manager within that social world.

The analysis of medial manager responses to the three primary subject positions resulted in identifying seven distinct responses, or 'ways of being a medial manager'. These are summarised in figure 19 below. The seven ways are firstly based on identifying which subject position(s) are of primary significance for the medial manager or which are prioritised (that is, the dimension of identification); and then secondly on the extent to which managers recognised competing organisational

interests and the ways in which they responded to and managed such interests (the dimension of agency).

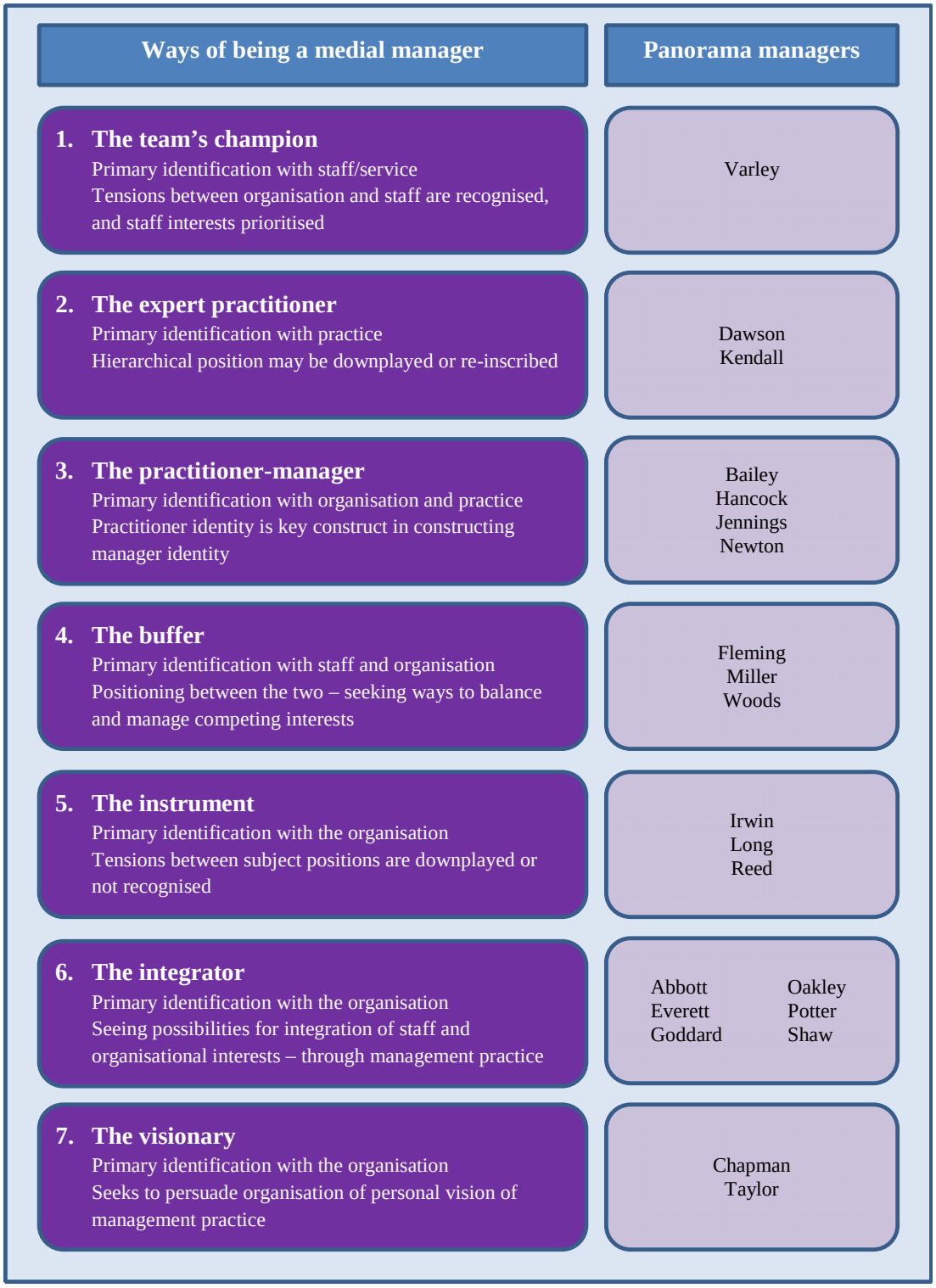


**Figure 19 – Ways of being a medial manager**

Before discussing these in more detail a number of important caveats need to be noted. First, the typology is presented as a way of representing and categorising the responses of the twenty one Panorama managers, and not as any generalisable typology of manager identity. Second, the categorising of managers as one type or another is not presented as a precise or quantitative process. Although some manager texts reflect the type relatively strongly and clearly, within each type there are important variations and nuances which are discussed and acknowledged below. Thirdly, such a typology is recognised within the research's philosophy as an 'artful contrivance' in which the researcher has imposed a particular form and perspective with which to frame and interpret the data; indeed the researcher acknowledges that the number seven is widely regarded as a significant number in stories. Nevertheless, the typology does provide as a useful way of reflecting the range of ways in which medial managers at Panorama made sense of their organisational position; and therefore highlights the range of some possible ways of 'being a medial manager'.

### 7.3.2 Categorising medial manager identity: seven ways to be a manager

This section presents a detailed analysis of an example of each 'way' of being a medial manager and the ways in which different organisational positions may be constructed, in order to reveal further insights into the nature of the position and the identity work undertaken in order to construct it. The analysis draws on the stories told by medial managers, analysed and discussed in section 6.3, the ways in which managers construct the organisation based on different paradigms, discussed in section 6.4, and the analysis of identity regulation and identity work in response to organisational subject positions presented in section 7.2. In doing so, the analysis starts to examine not only the surface picture of medial manager identity proposed by the interpretative framework of medial manager identity, but also the undercurrents of identity work which form such surface pictures (Ashforth, et al., 2008).

#### The first way: The team's champion

Of all the managers, Varley most explicitly positioned themselves as the representative and champion of the staff they manage:

> *Well, yeah - I tend to try, with the one-to-ones, [to] collate the information the best I can so that I get, you know, a strong impression from the team as to where I'm going to take the fight, ha...'Cause I can't fight every individual thing because the chain of command goes up quite a way so I'll pick the key issues that are affecting people and, you know, I'll concentrate on trying to move them.* – Varley, team leader

In their interview Varley presented themselves as being driven by "integrity...being prepared to stand up for what's right...being to be able to put your neck on the line if necessary and argue for what's...correct". Their first chosen story involved them arguing the case for an inexperienced but promising candidate at a recruitment panel and accepting responsibility for winning the argument over more senior managers – "on your head be it" – and their second story meant taking decisive action to help a sick staff member which became more important than any other immediate work responsibilities. In being responsive to staff demands that problems are resolved, Varley also describes drawing on their own experience to determine which issues to take up, judging "the strength of feeling among the team" and the merits of the case. Varley also expresses strong identification with their team. As well as constructing a key purpose of their role as being the "first port of call" for resolving staff problems, to be a "champion" for staff and to "stand up for them", Varley strongly identifies with the work of the service area and contrasts it to other, non-customer-facing parts of the organisation:

> *You know, 'Mrs Green' who's got multiple issues that need dealing with, and they [staff] need the skills and the expertise to be able to deal with 'Mrs Green's' issues because she can't communicate very well, she gets angry or frustrated or – We are the ones with the skills and ability to deal with that, you know?* – Varley, team leader

Varley's primary identification in their interview text is with their team and they constructed themselves as having a responsibility for their interests, but their practitioner experience and expert judgement is a significant resource. Their two chosen stories construct them as the donor to the candidate-hero on the recruitment panel – that is, one with esoteric knowledge who tests the hero – and as the hero doing battle with villainy to save a sick staff member. Read together these two

stories demonstrate Varley's use of expert insight to construct a personal position. In the first story Varley applies due process – the prescribed thing – to make their case for the candidate who performed best: "when there was a formal process in place then there is a duty to follow that in my mind anyway" while in the second they argue for "doing the right thing": "what do you do, walk away and there's nobody else to help". Varley's expert insight enables them to determine when to follow organisational processes and when they need to act independently.

Varley's organisational position as a champion of their team closely aligns with their construction of the organisation around a vertical tension between organisational and staff interests (section 6.4.1). Varley's text recognises organisational responsibilities such as performance and absence management – and that this may have to be enforced over personal relationships with staff – but they nevertheless establish a clear distance between themselves and senior managers, who make decisions "elsewhere, which have a consequent impact here and they might not even have considered", or who "find it very difficult to make decisions, you know, and accept the responsibility they've got". Varley's text also displays frequent dominance and countering strategies in order to resist organisational claims and to prioritise staff claims. Countering is achieved particularly by drawing on discourses of expertise and experience to justify Varley's position as being primarily concerned for the effective service delivery and needs of their team, and as one who understands it better than more distant senior managers. However, Varley also draws on organisational discourses of decisive and responsible managers to present themselves as willing to fulfil a managerial role in contrast to some senior managers:

> *Yeah, I mean it's frustrating, I think in my job one of the most stressful aspects is, as I say, you've got the responsibility for all these people and for this section but you haven't got the authority to do anything. So they give you responsibility to look after it but you've got no authority to make changes. You know, changes are made and decisions are made at a different level* – Varley, team leader

**The second way: The expert practitioner**

In their interviews, Dawson and Kendall both presented workplace identities primarily based on their practice and expertise. Dawson's story of celebrating their

team's success in helping customers constructs Dawson as an experienced caseworker or a 'helper', whose role is to provide support and guidance to their team, but who also identifies with the team's work and outcomes as their own:

> *What more can you ask? If you can help someone...you could turn their life around... I'm happy but I'm proud of the team and I'm proud of what we try to achieve, so in that respect I think sometimes you can hold your head up high and think, you know, at least I've tried to help someone, I've done my best for them, so I don't think there is much more you can ask for when that happens for you and when you're given that opportunity.* – Dawson, team leader

Kendall similarly draws on their experience and expertise, but for Kendall their identity is based on being able to be useful and that their role properly reflects their skills. When asked why they had picked their story of configuring a new system Kendall reflected:

> *Well I think I picked it because at the time it was quite an interesting part of - and a very <u>different</u> role. I found it interesting and I found it <u>different</u> to what I had been doing. Again, it was something I was kind of quite proud of but I suppose the <u>main</u> thing - I mean one of the things that you talked is - which you feel represents what your <u>role</u> means to <u>you</u>. Rather than what my role means, I suppose it's more what <u>I</u> can do for the business, as opposed to what my role means. <u>I</u> don't care what my role is, what I'm <u>called</u>, as long as I'm providing something that the business needs. Does that make sense?* – Kendall, team leader

Dawson and Kendall both suggested a careful management or downplaying of the organisational responsibilities implicit in their manager roles. Kendall draws on their willingness to be of service to the organisation – "I kind of just go with the flow, whatever the business needed...I kind of fit in with that. I'm not particularly bothered about progressing" – but they do not try to persuade staff to take on new roles or to develop skills which they characterise as "the painful option of forcing them to do something that they don't want to really to do." Kendall also does not attempt to persuade staff of decisions they do not personally agree with:

> *I suppose there are times when I've said well, yeah, if someone was to complain I'd say, well you know what, I possibly agree with you to a certain extent but this is what we've been told to do and, and it is what it is.* – Kendall, team leader

As noted in section 7.2.4 Dawson's text is notable for its lack of any reference to organisational tensions or of Dawson's need to act independently or to persuade or influence: the organisation, other services and staff are aligned in the shared purpose of supporting customers. Both Dawson and Kendall imply stronger relationships and identification with their teams than with the organisation, Dawson through repeated reference to their team and personal association with the team's work, and Kendall by prioritising staff interests and needs over organisational ones; but both contrast with Varley's willingness to "take the fight" to senior managers on behalf of their team.

The identity work undertaken by Dawson and Kendall through chosen narratives, constructed social worlds and responses to discourses reveals differences in the ways that two managers construct an ultimately similar organisational positioning. Dawson constructs a social world based on an external tension between the organisation and customers but which is resolved through helping customers to maximise organisational income. Dawson's organisational world is primarily aligned around this work and the work of Dawson and their team provides the essential mediation through their shared practice and expertise. Kendall constructs a social world based on internal tensions between organisational need and staff roles and capabilities. Whereas Dawson avoids any such tension through constructing a shared organisational purpose, Kendall manages the constructed tensions by drawing on the organisational hierarchy as a means of attributing appropriate responsibility and which supports a distancing strategy. Staff should not be expected to undertake responsibilities that go beyond their core role if they do not want to; similarly Kendall's role is to make their manager aware of problems and to implement solutions and decisions made by their manager. While Kendall makes little reference to common organisational discourses, Dawson displays a countering strategy by drawing on discourses such as staff development, staff engagement and teamworking to construct a managerial role which is primarily about supporting staff to deliver services through their expertise, and involving staff in decision-making

rather than imposing or defending decisions. Dawson's chosen story of celebrating their team's success reinforces their identification with their team which is underpinned by re-working discursive resources to construct an organisation in which all are aligned around a shared purpose and where there is no need for a formal managerial role. In contrast, Kendall's story sets them apart as one with a unique skill set which can be put at the service of the organisation.

**The third way: The practitioner-manager**

The interview texts of four managers, Bailey, Hancock, Jennings and Newton, also describe strong identifications as expert practitioners, but in contrast to Dawson and Kendall, these managers also appeared to be drawing on their practice to inform a personal interpretation of their role as a manager in the service of the organisation. Jennings provides a particular example of this.

Jennings' chosen story was an 'initiated quest' of promoting the value of their service area and growing it within the organisation. Jennings' personal expertise is central to their story and their hero role within it. They came to the organisation as the expert in their field: "I wouldn't say anyone's come from the same sort of background as [me]" but found that the organisation did not fully understand the role of their service area or recognise its potential value to the organisation: "and actually it's like, you've missed the <u>whole point</u>... so it's that element of things that sometimes just gets <u>totally</u> – it's not on peoples' radar". Jennings therefore set about developing their service area in order to secure greater status and recognition within the organisation, not only by promoting successes but by making the case for its contribution to organisational objectives and targeting key managers and services within the organisation – "I started getting the message up that...the work we do is valuable and it means a tenant [will] pay their rent which means that impacts on <u>your</u> business, so you should be grateful (laughs)" Success for Jennings is personal recognition both of their service area in which they are expert, and of their management capabilities in being able to deliver organisational outcomes, which is verified by being given additional resources "because we believe that you'll do the right thing...and you'll get the outcomes." Bailey, Hancock and Newton also all told stories which were also based on their own expert practice and the need to persuade or inform the organisation of new knowledge or perspectives.

Jennings constructs a personal version of being a manager in the organisation which is deeply informed by their practitioner background and expert knowledge. Rather than simply focus on the delivery of services or their personal practice, like Dawson and Kendall, their story is grounded in the importance of gaining organisational recognition, and this informs their personal interpretation of a manager role. Section 7.2.4 described in some detail how they use engagement tactics to creatively construct and enact their own version of a manager role. They construct an organisational world based on multiple service areas competing for scarce resources and attention, in which their role as a manager is to be able to demonstrate how the organisation fulfils organisational aims and values: "selling [ ] the service, I suppose and selling the benefits of it, you know, [ ] it's a constant thing but in this day and age you have to prove your worth". Unlike Dawson, Kendall or Varley, Jennings seeks and gains personal approval for their manager capabilities in being trusted with additional resources and interprets it as recognition of their success: "I came in thinking this is an undervalued, misunderstood area, and now it feels like there is real backing." Nevertheless, their expertise remains the key driver for Jennings' self-construction and their relationships with other organisational actors. They describe strong relationships with their team with whom they share expert knowledge and a commitment to the values of the service, and with whom they may share a sense of being misunderstood by others:

> *so there is a real kind of camaraderie and we are very much - we are the [service area] and - nobody messes with us! (laughs) So we do an amazing job and if people don't understand that they need to and - so there is that kind of - we're all together in it sort of thing.* – Jennings, service manager

Equally, Jennings describes their relationships with other service areas and managers in terms of the extent to which their role is recognised and valued: "you wouldn't necessarily think that a finance person would get it but actually it's those that interact with us and just have more of a knowledge". Although Jennings seeks organisational recognition and approval as a manager, their construction of a manager role is selective: it includes demonstrating how Jennings and their service can meet organisational objectives, but on the terms of the service's values, for example when it is assumed that the service will do certain kinds of work – "they're poles apart... In fact we never do that, that's [another service area's] territory!"– and

may not include promoting controversial organisational decisions, where Jennings might choose to prioritise relationships with their staff by establishing their own views:

> *Okay the Exec Team <u>want</u> this, because they think it is going to be good for business or blah blah blah blah blah, I know it's a bit of a pain, or, I know it's not actually what you want to do - run with it. You know. And kind of go with it - so I kind of - I'm on <u>your</u> side!* – Jennings, service manager

**The fourth way: The buffer**

The fourth way of being a manager characterises managers who described both a strong identification as a manager in the service of the organisation, and as members of their staff team. These managers also recognised tensions between organisational and staff interests, and their personal interpretations of being a manager involve finding ways to manage such tensions by acting as a 'buffer' between them. Woods is presented as an example of such a buffering role.

Woods' chosen story was an account of how they managed the staff rota, and which actually encompassed many short stories and story fragments about the different challenges this poses. Wood's story(s) was interpreted as a 'difficult task' read as part of an 'existential struggle' (section 6.3.2) of how Woods became a manager and their need to prove themselves to their line manager who had "put their faith in me". Read as a story of becoming a manager, Woods' text contrasts with other stories of becoming a manager, such as those of Goddard and Potter, by focusing on the challenges of managing relationships and responsibilities to both the team they manage, and the manager and organisation that they represent. The example of managing the staff rota highlights the ongoing tension between organisational and staff interests which informs Woods' construction of an organisational social world (section 6.4.1): the organisation must have cover at all times, but staff may have individual needs, sometimes unforeseen, that must be accommodated; and the organisation may make strategic or resourcing decisions which affect staff workloads. Woods themselves accepts responsibilities for both staff and organisational and staff interests: staff are their former colleagues and friends who deserve respect and whose role Woods is familiar with: "I'm acting the way I want to be treated as, you know, I'm no better than you, we're all the same, we are all the

same"; while the organisation has appointed them to a particular role; "I'm a team leader...we've got to implement things...because at the end of the day...you want to give the best service". Woods describes their role in managing the rota as needing to continually balance and counter-balance such interests: "It's like playing chess, it's like you've got to move things about to get the result you need."

Woods makes extensive use of compartmentalisation (section 7.2.3) and distancing (7.3.3) tactics in order to manage competing interests between staff and the organisation. Compartmentalisation involves creatively and opportunistically playing up or down their manager role in order to respond to different staffing situations. By playing up their manager role Woods is able to negotiate small favours with staff, such as allowing switches or even temporarily covering for them themselves. However, Woods can also use their manager role to distance themselves from organisational decisions, either by relying on organisational procedures – "there's rules and – we've all got to go by the rules" – or by inviting staff to understand that sometimes Woods has no personal choice but to act in accordance with organisational expectations: "but you go [ ] yeah, what would you do? And they go, fair enough. You know, you spin it back round to them and say yeah, you know, you [do this job], what would you do?" Woods also draws on their practitioner experience and the particular circumstances and needs of their service to justify their flexible approach, which might not be wholly in line with organisational policies:

> *On paper it's like, that's the way it's going to be, but... to get from A to Z there's a lot ways to get there... I said right, and I could see them [HR] going - well how do you do that and you go but you've got move back to there and that them there and they're like - it's like a separate language, but it is, because it's people's lives them dots...but, what them dots represent, that got [done, that got done]...everyone's happy, up here, because we've got the result. So that's how I can explain how it's a game of chess.* – Woods, team leader

Fleming constructs a similar buffering role between staff and senior manager expectations and interests through establishing trust in their capabilities to manage the service and their integrity regarding decisions and instructions. However, Miller describes a more strategic approach to managing staff and organisational interests: they provide support to staff by recognising the difficulties they face in their role and

will defend them via their own manager against unfair criticisms by senior managers; but unlike Varley they describe no sustained role in representing and defending the interests of their staff, and their text does not suggest that their personal criticisms of the organisation are voiced, but remain a personal view:

> *I'm overreaching myself sometimes and I think that occasionally when you're like that it's sometimes quite difficult to (pause) er, I dunno, to provide your maximum output or to, I don't know, perform to your liking, I'd like sometimes to maybe to be a little bit more creative, sit aside a little bit and say right, let's sit aside and let's think about these things, but the nature of the communities that we work in don't give us that opportunity, you know, and I think sometimes that can be lost, in this building, this building is a lovely, beautiful building but there are people in it who have no idea about the societies that we work in outside the doors and so sometimes I think that is the kind of conflict that occurs within a housing organisation really.* – Miller, team leader

**The fifth way: The instrument**

In contrast to the 'buffer' position, the fifth 'way of being a manager' positions the manager as the loyal instrument of the organisation. Irwin, Long and Reed described primary identification as managers in the service of the organisation, drawing strongly on the organisation to provide role meaning, and tending to downplay or not present as significant any organisational tensions. Reed provides a particular illustration of such a position.

Reed's text emphasises their personal commitment to the organisation and its aims and their willingness to work over and above the requirements of their role to achieve it. Talking about their chosen story about organising a community event they explain:

> *I see it as, you either fully commit to something and get it done well, or you - there's no point in doing a half-hearted effort so....it's a massive kind of way of showing people what Panorama are about. So...I think it's really important to make sure it goes well and make sure we're reflected well and make sure the customers know it's for them and the partners see the type of*

> *things that we do over and above what we are required to* – Reed, service manager

Reed identifies strongly both with the organisation and personally with their line manager. They draw on a wide range of key organisational discourses, including discourses of being a business, customer focus, manager responsibility and social responsibility, but rather than re-working them to construct a personal manager role they use these to demonstrate their alignment with and commitment to the organisation and its values. The previous quote illustrates Reed drawing on discourses of customers and social responsibility – "over and about what...we are required to do" and they further align their service area with fulfilling the organisation's commitment to both its business objectives and its responsibilities towards customers:

> *They all go towards sustainable tenancies, creating better places to live...so it does all add up to benefit the organisation, but on the whole it's something that the company have made the decision to do, to benefit our customers really*. – Reed, service manager

Similarly, Reed draws on discourses of professional and financial responsibility to demonstrate their qualities as a manager and their understanding of and commitment to the organisation's ways of working: "We're quite <u>targeted</u> in the work we do...there's always some kind of justification for the work we do as well."

Reed also demonstrates a strong personal identification with their own line manager. They see a number of parallels between their line manager and themselves: "[they were] in a similar situation to me, and one of [their] managers encouraged [them] to take a step and [they've] kind of never looked back and [they] see possibly the same potential in me". Their line manager provides a key role model for them and has been "instrumental" in helping them develop management skills and perspective and "changing your mind-set". Their line manager continues to provide an essential source of support and direction: "To this day, I'll often just go and knock on [their] door and say, oh hi, you know type of thing, and even if just to tell [them], like, what we've been doing over the last week." Reed also constructs their line manager and other senior managers as having a key directional role in their work and in their

service area and determining duties and key priorities and "about, you know, the direction we're going in, what - how they see it going".

Reed's 'instrument' position is supported by their chosen story of the 'difficult task' of organising a community event which demonstrates their ability to fulfil organisational expectations of a manager (an existential struggle form of plot, section 6.3.2). Their role as the loyal manager also acts as a mediation of the organisational world they construct across external tensions between the organisation and its customers (section 6.4). Reed suggests that this tension between business objectives and social objectives is resolvable because the organisation has chosen to undertake social responsibilities beyond its commercial ones, and that Reed's service helps the organisation to fulfil those social objectives. Reed's text also recognised two possible identifications as a practitioner concerned for customer wellbeing and as a manager concerned for the organisation. Reed constructs a mediating role through a merger tactic (section 7.2.3) which seeks to embody the synergy and alignment between manager and practice responsibilities as the 'organisational manager' in which they act as an organisational expert to their team of practitioners, helping the team to understand how their work contributes to and aligns with organisational objectives, keeping the team informed about the rest of the organisation and promoting the work of their team within the organisation. That is, in contrast to managers who construct an 'expert practitioner' or a 'practitioner manager' position they act as a loyal representative of the organisation, drawing on their organisational role for meaning and seeking to fulfil organisational aims through their service area; and in contrast to managers constructing a 'buffer' or a 'team's champion' position they construct staff interests as unproblematic, capable of being aligned with and contributing to organisational objectives through Reed's own loyal management.

**The sixth way: The integrator**

Like the 'instrument' position, 'integrator' managers reflected a significant degree of identification with the organisation in their interview texts. However, their texts also suggested a more active role in and responsibility for creating alignment and integration between organisational and other interests, with the manager personally embodying the organisation and its values rather merely acting as its loyal but vicarious instrument. Abbott, Everett, Goddard, Oakley, Potter and Shaw all offer

evidence of 'integrator' positioning; however Oakley provides a particularly interesting example of some of the processes of constructing such a position.

Oakley constructs their organisational role as one of creating and sustaining alignment between the organisation and staff:

> *But for me... you've got to be able to have people on your side. Okay they're never going to be fully on your side but it's this – it's trying to get the best out of people, trying to persuade people, and you do have to meet in the middle sometimes with some people, but what I think the skill is, you try to get the best for the staff, you try to get the best out of the staff but also at the same time make sure the business objectives are met, as well.* – Oakley, team leader

Oakley recognises differences in staff and organisational interests – "they're never going to be fully on your side" – but also reflects organisational discourses of staff engagement and being a good employer: "you try to get the best for the staff, you try to get the best out of staff". However, Oakley constructs their alignment role from the side of the organisation. They are seen as part of management by staff and Oakley recognises their responsibilities as a representative of the organisation with referential influence:

> *It's just stopping and thinking about what you're actually doing, about looking at the wider implications and how you're - how you respond to people, how that impacts on everything because...once you respond to one person it gets round*. – Oakley, team leader

Such responsibilities also mean subordinating personal preferences to organisational needs – "if people ask me a direct question I want to answer it straight away" – and during the restructure (the subject of their second story) Oakley offered support to staff while not revealing that their own job was also potentially at risk:

> *I think it came out towards the end that [we] were sort of affected and people were quite shocked because they didn't even think that we would…you know, we formed part of that whole process...and that was a challenge.* – Oakley, team leader

Oakley's text fully recognises the different interests of staff and the organisation and the organisational world they construct is based on vertical tensions (section 6.4.1). With reference to the organisational restructure they empathise with staff feelings and fears – "it will affect you, it's quite harsh isn't it" – while defending the organisational process: "Panorama have handled it as best they could in that situation". More widely, Oakley recognises the tension between staff focus on and concerns with their customer-facing role, and organisational objectives of delivering high performance and growing the business. Oakley's own explanation for their chosen stories was that they demonstrated their skills as a team leader and how they meet organisational requirements, one (organising a marketing presentation) illustrating their ability to fulfil organisational requirements – "it is a positive thing isn't it, it's a task that I've been asked to do and I've done it" – and their ability to combine organisational objectives with staff engagement in the task; and the other (the restructure) illustrating their experience of the key management skill of change management "because it was something that is...in management books and everything isn't it". In other words, Oakley uses their choice of stories to construct themselves in a particular way, as both a loyal and as an effective and skilled manager. Mediation of their constructed social world is through their own personal capabilities in fulfilling organisational requirements of a manager.

However, section 6.3.2 also noted that Oakley's text can be read as including an underpinning meta-story of existential struggle. In part this arose from taking on a new role managing a team whose work they had little prior experience of. Oakley suggests an implied discourse of expertise which should inform the team leader role: "I'm still trying to find my feet in there and because I'm still learning on the job I don't always have the right answers", and staff may still go to the person who previously managed them. Oakley counters (section 7.2.3) discourses of expertise with discourses of managerial skills and particularly managerial learning and development. They present their acceptance of the new role as taking on "a new challenge" rather than sticking to what they were familiar with, and further draw on their willingness to take advantage of studying for a management qualification through the organisation's talent management programme. Oakley suggests that not all managers are willing or able to undertake academic study – "people have different learning styles, don't they, and they don't always want to do the academic

side" – but that academic study has added to their capabilities and demonstrates their willingness to improve: "Having the qualifications does help. I know experience is important as well but I think if you've got the balance it does help." Oakley's construction of themselves as a manager in the service of the organisation may also have been partially driven by their experience of the restructure and of finding that staff perceived team leaders as managers, despite their close working and supportive relationship: "They see us – although we're team leaders, they see us as management...that was quite difficult because you think you've built up a trust with people, over the period you've worked with them." For Oakley, organisational discourses of management capabilities and manager learning provide an important resource to enable them to construct a developing managerial identity.

**The seventh way: The visionary**

The final 'way of being a manager' characterises what might be thought of as a particular form of the 'integrator' position. The interview texts of Chapman and Taylor both display strong identification with the organisation and roles as its representatives, and both describe actively seeking to transform their service area; but what distinguishes the stories and texts of Chapman and Taylor from other 'integrator' positions is the extent to which they draw on and describe implementing their own visions and values. That is, they are presenting themselves not only as representatives of the organisation in their service areas, but as seeking to influence and transform the organisation itself.

Chapman is more overt in constructing themselves as a manager bringing their own vision. Their story of transforming their poorly performing service area begins with Chapman's appointment and the organisation's recognition that they have expertise which the organisation lacks: "they wanted someone who had the [business] mentality that they could bring to it". In recognition of their expertise Chapman was told that they were being given a "blank canvas" and that they would be fully supported in whatever they wanted to do: "[the CEO] spoke to me directly and he said it doesn't matter how much it costs. You tell me what we need to make it work, and we'll make it work." However, Chapman's story is interpreted as an initiated, rather than a dispatched quest because Chapman claims a personal drive and vision throughout. They joined the organisation specifically because they were looking for a new challenge; and it is their own vision of promoting success and supporting staff

development which results in transforming service performance. Chapman takes personal responsibility for service outcomes: "I try and tell my team that they're representing me, so if they make a mistake I make a mistake" and takes a personal interest in the progress of staff members. Moreover, their approach to creating a culture of high performance, high commitment and investment in staff has also been taken up by the whole organisation:

> *The more I've sold it, the more I've said it, the better it makes sense really... [senior managers] just jumped on board....I've always thought that's the best way to do things, and that's what I've just instilled in the business...I've brought that in myself, in my vision, 'cause I think that's the best thing to do.* – Chapman, service manager

Taylor's story of service transformation is less dramatic, but also constructs Taylor as acting to fulfil and implement their own vision. Taylor's story has been interpreted as a 'battle' against the inadvertent effects of organisational actions affecting Taylor's staff, and a significant element of Taylor's response is to re-frame the meaning and work of the service and the team. They re-frame the team's feelings of being given any "additional work" that was not the specific responsibility of other teams as being a reflection of the team's central role in providing a holistic service to customers: "it wasn't so much that it was additional work, it was work that...we should have been doing anyway...we do need to put our arms around the customer, and we have to do more than we've done before." But they also challenge the ways in which the team is measured and re-inscribe the meaning of success. Performance indicators – which are in Panorama – do not necessarily reflect the work done by the team or the real value of an outcome, both for customers and for the organisation: although a performance indicator may not have been met "it's a success in the respect that we've met something that we couldn't meet...so as a result of the staff's – the way they operate and work, and the sort of commitment to sort of get the [outcome], it's a success." Taylor also chose their story as representing their perspective which is wider than just a concern with performance:

> *I mean it would be easy for me to say that I've come here and [performance was poor] and seen that as a priority, I've got that down, you know, as far as I'm concerned it is all on [target for] PIs. And what I was trying to look at*

> *was, sort of, a <u>wider</u> perspective rather than it being just about performance, about the benefits of understanding how the dynamics of the team, the situation the team were in, how they, how people were feeling, how individual emotions were, I suppose, within the team.* – Taylor, service manager

Taylor's story therefore encompasses helping to gain more recognition for the team's work, and focusing on creating individual relationships with team members in order to change behaviours, including encouraging better behaviours at team meetings; offering personal meetings with team members and not publically criticising them; admitting when they make a mistake; and helping team members to develop personal development plans. Although organisational discourses of staff involvement and engagement have been identified (section 6.2.2) Taylor's story constructs them as deliberately proposing and enacting an alternative and complementary perspective to mere focus on performance indicators: not to challenge the organisation's concern with performance and success, but to interpret its true meaning.

### 7.3.3 Summary – medial manager organisational positioning

This section has presented analysis of the twenty one Panorama manager interviews within the framework of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (section 3.5). The analysis suggests that the research conceptualisation is robust and reflective of medial manager experience. The analysis has demonstrated both the wide range of ways in which medial managers may make sense of their organisational position and role in their interview talk about themselves, identifying seven distinct 'ways of being a manager', and that these different ways may be conceptualised in terms of manager responses to different possible subject positions and identifications of being a manager in the service of the organisation, being a practitioner or being a member of a team or service area. The analysis has also demonstrated how such positions are also informed by and reflected in the stories told by medial managers and the identity work undertaken through them: the narrative plots and roles, and the social worlds that these stories are derived from and trace a path through. The method of story elicitation was deliberately chosen to enable managers to present themselves, their organisational role and the meaning of their position in very personal ways which were not prematurely framed by the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (Fielding & Thomas, 2008;

Flick, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). The elicited stories therefore provide an important form of triangulation (Stake, 1995) and a test of coherence (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) in supporting the utility of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity and its contribution to our repertoire of social constructions and cognitive structures (Donmoyer, 2000).

The range of personal interpretations of the medial manager position is particularly notable given Panorama's very evident efforts to 'engineer' (C. Casey, 1995) a particular type of manager who actively owns and promotes Panorama objectives and decisions. Neither do manager positions appear to be particularly determined by hierarchy: team leaders are represented in six out of seven 'ways' and service managers are represented in five. The findings not only reinforce the importance of not treating managers as homogenous groups (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002) but further highlight the ambiguous, fragile and contested nature of the manager position (*e.g.* Clarke, et al., 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Harding, et al., 2014; McConville & Holden, 1999; Sims, 2003; Watson, 1997). In their interview talk managers recognised multiple possible subject positions of being a manager, being a practitioner and being a member of a team or service (section 7.2.1) and responded to different possible subject positions and discourses in highly individual ways (sections 7.2.3, 7.2.4). The findings therefore support the research conceptualisation of the medial manager as describing the *state* of being 'in-between' competing demands, and which requires extensive identity work to make individual sense of the medial manager position. The research conceptualisation of medial manager identity provides a means of helping to frame and interpret these individual responses to the multiple subject positions impinging on the medial manager role.

## 7.4 Summary

This chapter has presented the third stage of analytical process. Whereas chapter 6 analysed medial manager stories as self-presentations and attended to the ways in which managers privilege different managerial functions, tasks and relationships when presenting themselves and the meaning of their organisational role, chapter 7 has started to analyse medial manager interview texts in the context of their organisational position as medial managers 'in-between' competing organisational

interests and subject positions. Three phases of analysis have been presented. First, thematic analysis across the manager interview texts has identified possible subject positions as being a manager representing the organisation, a team member representing staff or a service area, and a practitioner representing the needs of customers or the demands of a profession; but thematic analysis has also revealed the wide and nuanced range of interpretations of such subject positions between managers. Second, the chapter has identified a typology of tactics undertaken by managers in order to negotiate and manage multiple subject positions, and to manage contested subject positions or discourses. Third, analysis and interpretation of the medial manager texts as responses to multiple possible subject positions has been presented and seven different interpretations of the medial manager position and organisational role distinguished. By presenting detailed examples of each of these seven interpretations of the medial manager position, which reflect the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity, the chapter has started to demonstrate not only the extent of agency afforded to medial managers by multiple possible subject positions to make individual responses to such positions, but how the processes of identity work revealed through narrative and paradigmatic analysis, and the typology of strategies to manage multiple and contested subject positions inform and support such positionings. The chapter has therefore addressed research objective 4: *To understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims;* and started to answer research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.*

The chapter has therefore found empirical support for the research proposal that the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity serves as a valid and useful "picture[ ] of the surface of an ocean wave" (Ashforth, et al., 2008, p. 341). In the next chapter the findings of chapters 6 and 7 are further discussed and analysed in order to further uncover and examine the processes of identity work involved in constructing such different interpretations of the medial manager organisational position and the affording and constraining factors at work in such identity work: that is, the "undercurrents" that form the surface wave of medial manager identity.

# Chapter eight – The identity work of medial managers

## 8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the final stage of the analytical process set out in section 5.4.3. In this stage the medial manager positionings identified in chapter 7 are further analysed in the context of their stories, their construction of a personal social world and their responses to discursive subject positions in order to identify key factors which afford or constrain different organisational positionings (figure 20). This chapter therefore addresses research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.* In doing so the chapter also begins to identify and discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of the research: for understanding identity, for understanding managers and, potentially, for organisational practice. In particular it demonstrates how the research findings are able to address not only the 'picture of the surface wave' of medial manager identity but the 'undercurrents' of processes which form the surface wave (Ashforth, et al., 2008).

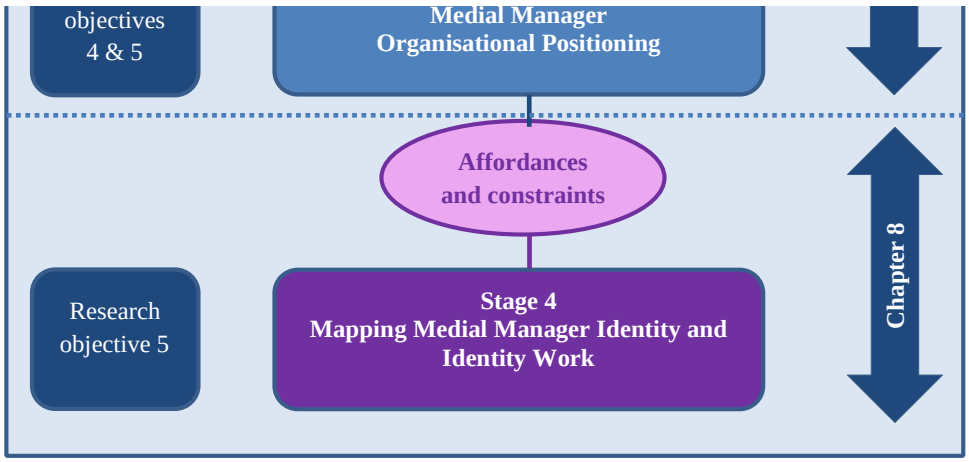


**Figure 20 – Position of affordances and constraints within the analytical process**

The chapter proceeds in three sections. First, the findings presented in chapters 6 and 7 are briefly reviewed, with preliminary implications and conclusions highlighted. This analysis forms the basis for the development of two theoretical contributions. The narrative conceptualisation of identity presented in chapter 2 is

further refined in order to distinguish three distinct but inter-dependent phases of identity work. The analysis of chapters 6 and 7 also forms the basis for the final stage of analysis in which the data and findings are further analysed in order to identity key factors which may afford or constrain medial manager identity. The section concludes by presenting an original and integrative model of medial manager identity which maps out the key processes, affordances and constraints of medial manager identity work within the organisational context. In the second section the chapter further discusses the presented model of medial manager identity work by using it to further analyse and interpret the different organisational positions and 'ways of being a manager' described by medial managers at Panorama Housing (section 7.3). That is, the chapter demonstrates how the integrative model of medial manager identity helps to describe and interpret the processes of identity work (the undercurrents) which form different medial manager responses to their organisational position 'in-between' (the surface wave). Thirdly the chapter discusses some of the practical implications for organisations of the research findings, and argues that they make a number of potential contributions to organisational practice as means of better understanding the role of medial managers.

## 8.2 Conceptualising the identity work of medial managers

This section presents the development of a model of medial manager identity work. First, the section briefly reviews the key findings of chapters 6 and 7 and proceeds to build on these findings in order to develop our understanding of identity by proposing three inter-dependent but distinct phases of narrative identity work. Second, the section presents a meta-analysis of the findings so far presented, in order to identify the key affordances and constraints at play in medial manager identity work. Finally the section presents an original and integrative model of medial manager identity work.

### 8.2.1 Developing narrative identity and narrative identity work

Chapter 2 set out a narrative conceptualisation of identity which integrates Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity as the interaction and interplay through identity work between the individual (self-identity) and their social context (identity regulation), with a Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) concept of mythical thought in which myths – narratives, including self-narratives – are understood as surface-level

stories derived from “deep structures” based on a limited set of oppositions, and through which oppositions a narrative traces an intervening path. This is summarised in figure 1, repeated below.

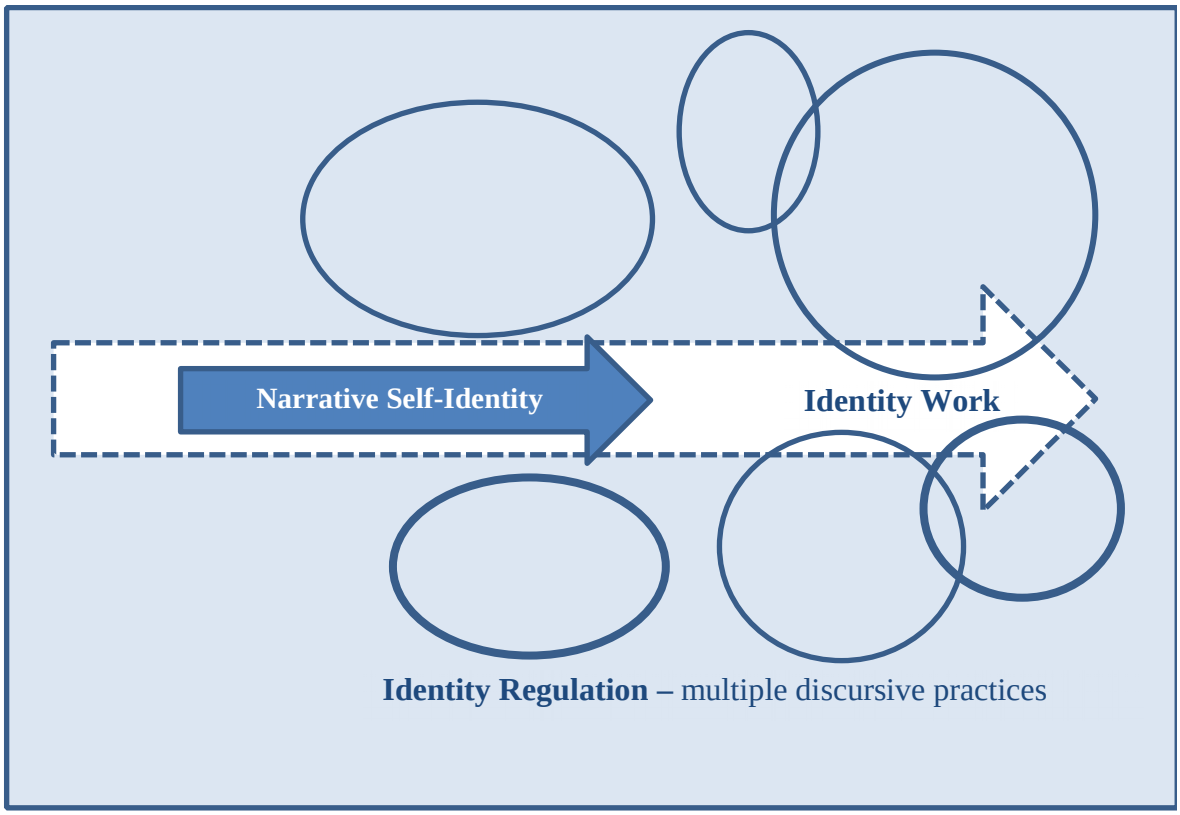


**Figure 1 – A narrative conceptualisation of identity (repeated from section 2.6)**

Self-identity is understood more explicitly as narrative self-identity and is expressed as an arrow in order to reflect the ways in which narrative provides an account of the individual’s life in terms of unity and purpose over time (Gergen, 2001; McAdams, 1985; Ricoeur, 1992; Watson, 2009) which links the individual’s past, present and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; Sims, 2005b, 2008). Identity work is similarly expressed as a dotted arrow enveloping narrative self-identity, to express the ongoing work of continually “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262) narrative self-identity in the context of identity regulation. This identity work may apply to past understandings of narrative self-identity as well as the present and the future. Identity regulation is expressed as the multiplicity of discursive practices impinging upon narrative self-identity over time and space. Drawing on Levi-Straussian mythical thought, identity work is specifically conceptualised as the ways in which an individual responds to, and

establishes a position within multiple discursive practices of identity regulation through telling stories about the self and others, which both selectively construct a particular social landscape, and positions the self within that social landscape.

The collection and analysis of data has drawn on this conceptualisation of identity. By eliciting stories from managers about themselves and their organisational roles, and by analysing these stories syntagmatically as narratives and paradigmatically, the research has demonstrated how manager stories both construct particular and selective versions of their organisational world and other actors, and construct a meaningful position within that organisational world (chapter 6). Narrative analysis has revealed a wide range of forms of identity work undertaken through storytelling. The choice of story subject itself selects and privileges certain manager functions over possible others (section 6.3.1). Different plots construct the manager in different ways, as successful achievers or strugglers for recognition, as loyal servants or experienced and capable agents, or as defenders and protectors of others (section 6.3.2). The roles that managers adopt and the roles that managers ascribe to others reveal some of the ways in which managers understand and make sense of their organisational role, and the meaning and significance of their relations with other organisational actors (section 6.3.3). Finally paradigmatic analysis has revealed how managers construct the organisation along vertical, horizontal, internal or external tensions, and how these different constructs suggest some of the different actors and relationships which are foregrounded in different social worlds, and which imply different positions from which managers might construct self-identities (section 6.4.1). Section 6.4.2 further demonstrated how the stories told by medial managers both construct the manager's personal social world and establish an individual intervening path through selected oppositions which form that social world.

Whereas chapter 6 highlights the nature of identity work in constructing a personal interpretation of the manager's organisational role, chapter 7 attends to the nature of the discursive context in which medial managers at Panorama work: that is the nature of identity regulation. Analysis of all twenty one manager interview texts found three generalised subject positions recognised within the texts, albeit with some significant variety of meaning within each position: as a manager in the service of the organisation, as a practitioner and as a member of the manager's team or service area; and all manager texts recognised at least two different subject positions

(section 7.2.1). Sections 7.2.3 and 7.2.4 identified the range of ways in which managers accepted, contested, rejected or re-worked different subject positions and discourses, and identified a typology of tactics for managing multiple subject positions (categorised as intersection, dominance, compartmentalisation and merger (adapting Roccas and Brewer (2002)) and a further set of tactics for managing contested subject positions (categorised as distancing, countering, engagement and submission).

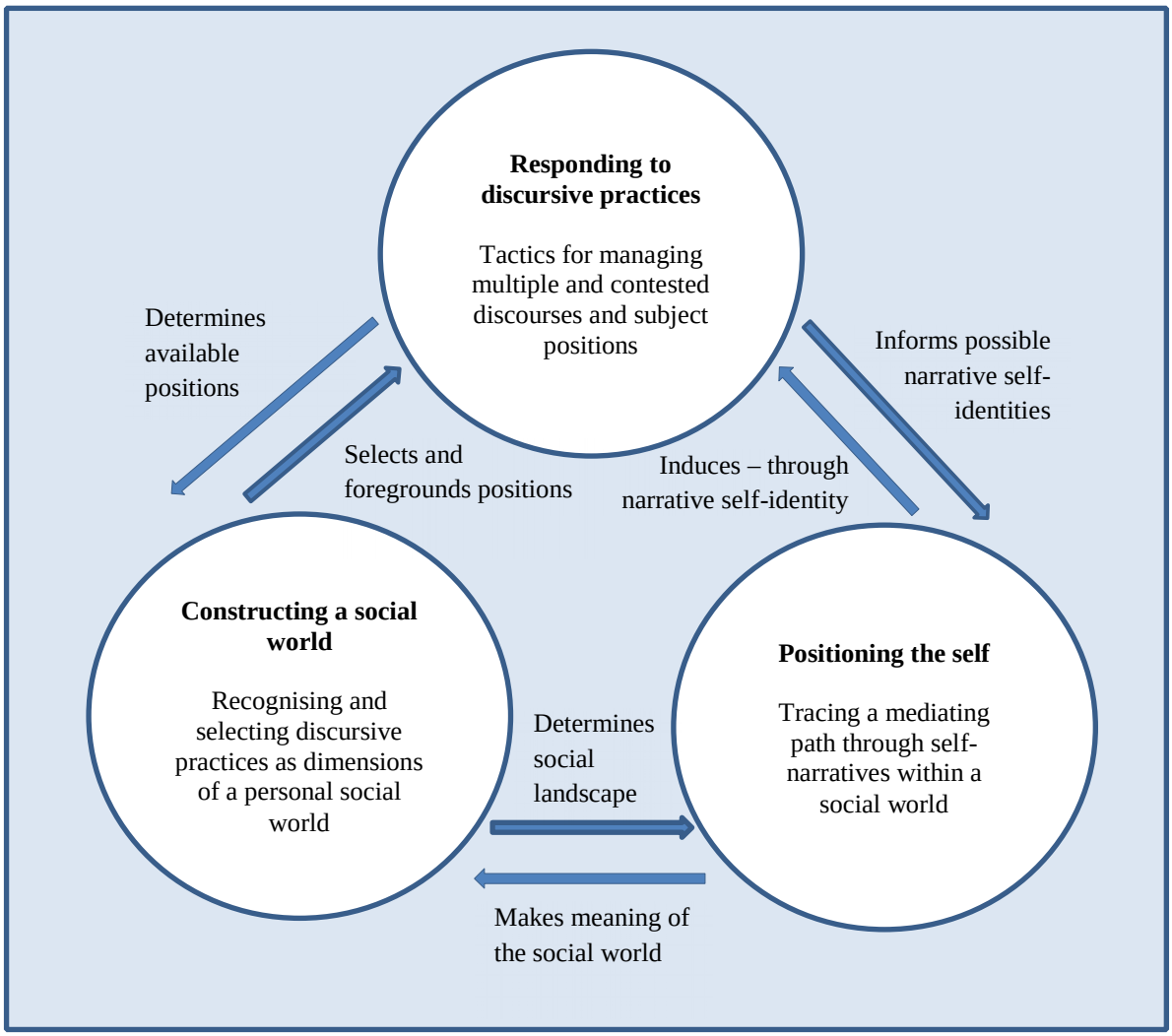


**Figure 21 – Three phases of identity work**

A Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) conceptualisation of identity highlights the complex interplay between the self and the social. Identity work is not simply the process of negotiation between two dynamic influences, identity regulation and self-identity, but the processes by which the individual self selectively constructs a social world in which they then position themselves – drawing on available materials and

constructing a world and a position which is recognisable and credible to others (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Reedy, 2009; Sims, 2005a, 2005b). Drawing on a Levi-Straussian mythical conceptualisation of narrative identity work, and the analysis of empirical data summarised so far from chapters 6 and 7, a model of identity work is developed (figure 21 above) which interprets the complex interplay of ways in which managers construct themselves as three distinct but inter-dependent phases of identity work.

The model remains founded upon the concept of identity work as the continual dynamic in which (narrative) self-identity is formed, repaired, maintained, strengthened or revised (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) in response to discursive social practices. It distinguishes three phases of this dynamic between self-identity and identity regulation which are distinct, but inter-dependent and not causally or sequentially related. The phase 'responding to discursive practices' reflects the nature of identity regulation in a given context: the ways and extent to which it impinges upon the individual self and the ways and extent to which the individual is able and willing to respond to such discursive social practices. 'Constructing a social world' characterises the ways in which individuals select particular discourses in order to construct a personal social world. The nature of this social world is prescribed by the available discursive resources and the ways and extent to which the individual is able to respond to them; but the construction of a social world also selects and foregrounds particular discourses and tactics in response. 'Positioning the self' reflects the ways in which individuals position themselves within a social world through narrative. A social world provides a context and landscape within which a narrative may take place and delineates the significant features through which a narrative must trace a particular path; but a particular narrative also gives meaning to the social landscape, for example whether, in the case of an organisational landscape based on vertical tensions between staff and organisational interests, those interests are potentially reconcilable or must be negotiated, kept apart or maintained through taking one side over another. The nature of narrative self-identity and the ways in which the individual can position themselves through narrative is also informed and prescribed by the availability and nature of discursive practices; but narrative self-identity, narrative plot and narrative role also prompts and encourages particular responsive tactics to discursive practices and subject

positions, by providing an available story, or framework, with which to make sense of those subject positions and discursive claims.

Understanding identity work in terms of three distinct and inter-dependent phases is an important step towards uncovering the "undercurrents" of identity work, by providing a framework for identifying and analysing different processes. However, it does not in itself explain how or why managers construct different workplace identities, and different responses to the position of the medial manager 'in-between, as described by the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity. The next section therefore presents an analysis of the key factors which may afford and constrain the three phases of identity work, and which further interpret the ways in which medial managers construct workplace identities.

### 8.2.2 Key affordances and constraints of medial manager identity work

The research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (section 3.5) proposes that managers are subject to potentially competing subject positions and identifications, and that such multiple identifications and potentially competing organisational interests afford medial managers a degree of agency to make individual responses and interpretations of their position. Analysis presented so far has supported this conceptualisation of medial manager identity. Section 7.2.1 found that three particular possible subject positions were recognised by Panorama managers within their interview texts: to be a manager in the service of the organisation, to be a practitioner in the service of operational delivery, and/or to be a member and representative of the staff team they manage. Sections 7.2.3 and 7.2.4 identified a range of different tactics used by managers within their texts to respond to and to interpret multiple and/or contested subject positions. Section 7.3 further analysed the manager interview texts in terms of their different responses to possible identifications and subject positions and their self-presentations through elicited stories, and identified seven distinct responses to the medial manager's organisational position, characterised as 'ways of being a manager'. The final stage of analysis therefore involves reviewing and closely reading the manager texts and previous coding in order to identity key factors which may afford, or constrain managers' responses to multiple and competing identity claims (as set out in chapter 5.4.3). These factors were found to cluster around three key themes: perceptions of

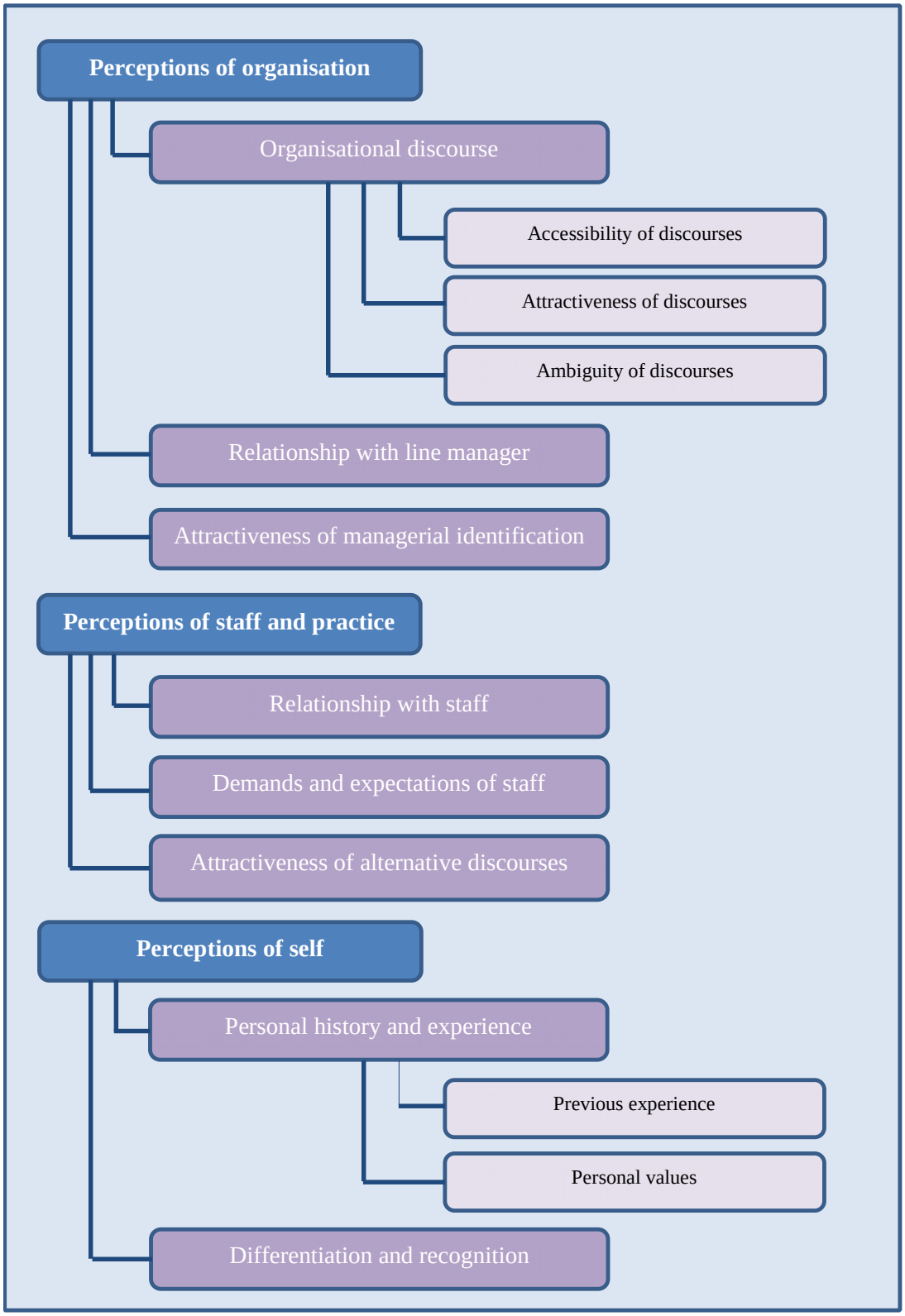


**Figure 22 – Factors affording and constraining medial manager identity work**

the organisation, perceptions of staff and perceptions of the self. A summary of this analysis is presented in figure 22.

**Perceptions of the organisation**

Three aspects of organisational perceptions are identified. The first is the nature of organisational discourse. Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 set out the particular organisational and discursive context of Panorama Housing. Soon after its formation the chief executive and senior managers embarked on a programme of cultural change with the purpose of establishing a strong organisational identity which also differentiated Panorama from its former local authority housing origins. Analysis of the organisational discursive context identified a strong and relatively coherent organisational identity: as a business, characterised by discourses of commercial growth and competition, customers, financial responsibility and managers who are professionally competent and can exercise leadership; as 'being the best', characterised by discourses of continuous improvement, performance and success; and with a 'shared moral purpose', characterised by discourses of social responsibility and staff engagement and involvement. These discourses were not only found to infuse the organisational documents, artefacts and observed talk and action, but were also prominent in the majority of medial manager interview texts. The relative strength and consistency of these discourses within the organisation therefore makes them powerful manufacturers of subjectivity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) which seek to construct and position managers in certain ways by targeting the self (C. Casey, 1995; Costas & Fleming, 2009). However, managers are not wholly subject to organisational discourse or passive 'cultural dupes' (Garfinkel, 1967): the ways in which managers use and respond to organisational discourses also depends on their attractiveness, and on the extent of ambiguous discursive spaces (Alexiadou, 2001; Clarke, et al., 2009; Halford & Leonard, 2006) within which managers are able to re-work their own meanings. For example, as noted in section 7.2.1, Dawson and Long draw on discourses of staff involvement and engagement as a means of answering organisational expectations that they should actively manage and drive up staff performance, by focusing on being supportive to staff, finding out possible reasons for poor performance and inviting them to propose solutions. The strength and accessibility of a particular discourse can therefore also be used to override a less attractive one.

A second aspect of organisational perceptions is the nature of the manager's relationship with their own line manager. For some Panorama managers their own

line manager formed an important role in their own story – as father, donor or helper – and in their construction of a managerial identity. Line managers may act as mentors and induce strong personal loyalties. Both Reed and Woods spoke of seeking to fulfil the expectations that their manager has of them: "[They'd] put [their] faith in me giving me the job, because when [they] give me the job I thanked [them], obviously, and I said I won't let you down. And I wouldn't let [them] down" (Woods, team leader). Line managers may also serve as role models (Fleming, Long, Newton, Oakley) – "[their] management has probably made me a better manager myself" (Fleming, service manager) – as representing the ethos of the service (Oakley, Potter) – "[they are] a people person, [they've] got the right balance, [they're] very committed to the business, makes sure that all the targets are met and everything" (Oakley, team leader) – or as sources of support and back-up (Irwin) and guidance (Goddard).

Finally organisational perceptions include the perceived attractiveness of a managerial identification. For several managers (Abbott, Chapman, Everett, Fleming, Goddard, Potter, Taylor) their role as managers in the service of the organisation, driving change and achieving organisational objectives, forms a significant role in their self-presented stories and organisational positioning. For example, Everett explains how their personal values and desires fit with the organisational expectations of them:

> *I suppose my ethics are about valuing people, very strong work ethic, you know, very much about giving a hundred percent, and I guess I expect that in others which might mean I'm driven and I drive people. Yeah, it's very much about – I want to give a hundred percent, the company works that way so I fit in terms of, in that sense...I love transformation, I love, I suppose, working with people to make things improve or them improve, certainly here, I get the chance to do that on a regular basis.* – Everett, operations director

For managers such as Oakley and Reed, a managerial identity appears to offer a new and attractive role meaning, particularly as an alternative to identities based on experience and expertise which have become more problematic. However, for other managers an organisational managerial identification appears either less significant than other identities such as being a practitioner, or is even constructed as an anti-

position. Miller and Varley, for example, contrast themselves with more senior managers who act unethically or without fully understanding the facts, while Kendall describes being uncomfortable with certain aspects of management such as selling unpopular decisions or persuading staff to undertake new tasks, and states that they have no ambition to take on more managerial responsibilities:

> *I kind of just go with the flow, whatever the business needed... I kind of fit in with that. I'm not particularly bothered about progressing...to the level where my manager is. That doesn't wildly interest me, I'm happy to stay where I am until I'm not needed, and then if I'm needed to go and do something else I'm perfectly happy to kind of go and do that*. – Kendall, team leader

**Perceptions of staff and practice**

Perceptions of staff and practice also include a number of aspects. The first is the nature of the relationship with the staff team. One significant factor is whether the manager joined the team as a manager or was promoted internally: for example the stories of Goddard and Potter were about their promotions and explicitly included the need to re-negotiate their relationships with the team which informed their workplace self-identities. Another factor is the degree to which the manager shares professional and personal values and experience with the team: for example Bailey, Dawson and Jennings particularly drew on a shared identity with their team through shared values. A further factor is the importance for the manager of maintaining good relationships with their team. Woods emphasises the importance of retaining social capital in order to be able to call in favours, which means minimising any occasions of refusing staff requests; while the texts of Dawson, Kendall and Long all suggest that they seek to avoid any active challenges or confrontations with their team.

A related aspect is the manager's perceptions of staff demands of them, and the extent to which they are able, or wish to fulfil those demands. For example, Varley not only describes recognising and seeking out staff concerns but accepting a primary role in raising and resolving concerns on behalf of staff. In contrast, Oakley recognises a staff expectation that a team leader should have expertise in their service area, but chooses instead to construct an alternative managerial identity.

A third dimension of perceptions of staff and practice is the attractiveness of alternative identities to that of a manager in the service of the organisation. A number of managers drew on discourses of practice or expertise to construct an organisational role: for example as one with expert knowledge of customer needs or service delivery (Bailey, Dawson, Long, Miller, Newton); as one with special knowledge that the organisation needs to learn from (Hancock, Jennings); as one with unique skills which are at the service of the organisation (Kendall); or as one who acts as the representative of the team and the service area and advises ignorant managers of the impact of their decisions (Varley).

**Perceptions of self**

Perceptions of the self characterise factors which relate to the individual themselves: that is, the personal experiences, meanings and self-identities that they bring to their organisational position and role. Notwithstanding the obvious point that individual managers have individual personalities and operate in specific contexts, analysis of the Panorama manager texts has identified some particular common factors. A number of managers explicitly drew on their previous experience before becoming a manager to inform their practice as a manager and their understanding of the meaning of a managerial role: for example having professional knowledge and experience (Bailey, Chapman, Dawson, Jennings, Newton); having experience of working in the roles they now support others to do (Goddard, Hancock); and experience of working in other organisations (Miller, Potter, Shaw). Similarly, a number of managers referred to and drew on personal values which they brought with them, rather than learning them from the organisation. As Bailey puts it:

> *Part of what I've always been about is, you know, supporting people to try and make those positive changes. And it just hasn't been here, it's been what I've always done, I believe in what we try and achieve* – Bailey, service manager

Such personal values which are important to manager understanding of their organisational role include supporting and understanding vulnerable customers (Bailey, Dawson, Newton), being focused on people's needs (Potter), being socially responsible (Jennings, Reed) being successful (Chapman) or being useful (Kendall).

A further personal aspect which emerges strongly from the data is the wish for many managers to differentiate themselves. Managers sought to differentiate themselves in a number of ways, beginning with a majority of managers explaining how their service area was unique within the organisation or different to others in terms of the challenges it faces, with several suggesting that the importance of their service area was not fully recognised by the organisation. (It was interesting to note how, in more than one case, one manager's service area which they claimed to be less valued by the organisation was cited by another manager as one which was highly valued – as opposed to that manager's own.) As previously noted, for some managers (Abbott, Jennings, Taylor) their story – and their organisational positioning and identity – drew directly on the theme of gaining greater recognition for their team or service. Managers also sought to differentiate themselves in other ways. In particular a number of team leaders explicitly sought to contrast themselves to both their staff and their own line manager. For example, Goddard and Irwin displayed intersection tactics to construct a position which uniquely draws on elements of staff expertise and organisational commitment to improvements and constructs them as different to either; Potter described a merger tactic by integrating their concern for their team as a former team member with a concern for the wider organisational perspective as a manager; Kendall drew on organisational hierarchy to differentiate levels of responsibility between their staff, themselves and their manager; and Oakley reflected on their role which left them working closely with their team and not involved in senior management decisions, but nevertheless being seen as more separate and distant by their team: "although we're team leaders, they see us as management... that was quite difficult because you think you've built up a trust with people, over the period you've worked with them." Other team leaders, Miller and Varley, actively differentiated themselves from more senior managers through their expert knowledge, ethical practices (Miller) and willingness to make decisions (Varley). Finally, the related need for recognition formed an important part of many manager texts. Some managers sought recognition of their skills and experience through salary (Hancock, Miller) or being given additional resources (Jennings) and others sought recognition that they fulfilled organisational expectations of being a manager (Fleming, Irwin, Oakley, Reed, Woods). Recognition might be gained from a line manager or senior managers (Fleming, Reed, Woods) or from the manager's own reflexive recognition of their skills (Oakley). Recognition may be sought in

vain (Irwin); but lack of recognition may also form an important part of a manager's self-construction. Both Miller and Varley present themselves as being unrecognised by more senior managers who lack their own expert insight, and such lack of recognition supports rather than undermines their construction of themselves.

### 8.2.3 An integrative model of medial manager identity

This research set out to uncover the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association, and specifically to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible. Having revealed the rich diversity of manager identities and identity work through story elicitation and narrative and paradigmatic analysis (chapter 6); having demonstrated how such identities reflect and are informed by a conceptualisation of medial managers positioned between organisational, staff and practice demands (chapter 7); having developed a narrative model of identity and uncovered three interdependent facets of identity work (section 8.2.1); and having analysed factors which afford or constrain such identity work (section 8.2.2), it is now possible to answer the research question in two ways. First: to propose an integrative model of Panorama medial manager identity which addresses the 'undercurrents' of processes of identity work; and second: to start to explain how and why Panorama medial managers construct different workplace identities in response to their organisational position 'in-between'.

Section 3.5 proposed a research conceptualisation of medial manager identity in terms of the medial manager being 'in-between' and subject to multiple possible subject positions and identifications, and therefore with some degree of agency to make individual and differing interpretations of their organisational position and role. By identifying and characterising seven different 'ways of being a manager' (section 7.3.2) the research has provided a 'surface picture of the wave' (Ashforth, et al., 2008) of how medial managers at Panorama made different sense of their organisational position and described different responses to multiple and different subject positions in their interview talk. Figure 23 now presents an integrative model of medial manager identity, or the 'undercurrents' which form the surface wave. The 'engine' of the model remains Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) notion of identity as the continual dynamic between self-identity, identity regulation and

identity work. Self-identity is the self as reflexively understood at any point in time, and is sustained within a context of discursive practices and through identity work. However, the model further expresses a narrative understanding of identity, in which self-identity is understood as narrative self which provides a sense of unity and purpose over time (Gergen, 2001; McAdams, 1985; Ricoeur, 1992; Watson, 2009), and identity work is the process of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262) a narrative self over time, making sense of the past, present and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; Sims, 2005b, 2008) by positioning the self in response to selected discursive practices (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Levi-Strauss, 1963, 1983). That is, the model incorporates the narrative conceptualisation of identity expressed in figure 1 (section 2.6, repeated in section 8.2.1).

The model further draws on the conceptualisation of the medial manager as operating in a position 'in-between' organisational demands to deliver organisational objectives, and demands of staff and operational practice. In line with a Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) understanding of mythical thought, the model reflects a specific organisational context in which discursive practices are categorised as organisational ('top-down') and staff or practice ('bottom-up'). (Practice is placed with staff for a number of reasons. Managers who described a strong identification as practitioners typically also described close identifications with staff, or at least a concern not to jeopardise relationships with their team; and analysis of Panorama managers to subject positions of being a practitioner suggested that such subject positions arise from either previous positions as a staff member (with a greater direct practice role) or the expectations of staff to be an expert they could reply on. However, it should also be recognised that practice may also be a factor which informs the individual's personal history and role meaning, that it, individual mediating factors.) It was proposed that these discursive practices represented potentially competing demands which medial managers need to negotiate, and the analysis of Panorama manager stories and texts has supported this conceptualisation. A model of medial manager identity therefore conceptualises the identity work of "forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 262) a narrative self within the particular organisational context of these competing discursive practices to which medial managers are subject.

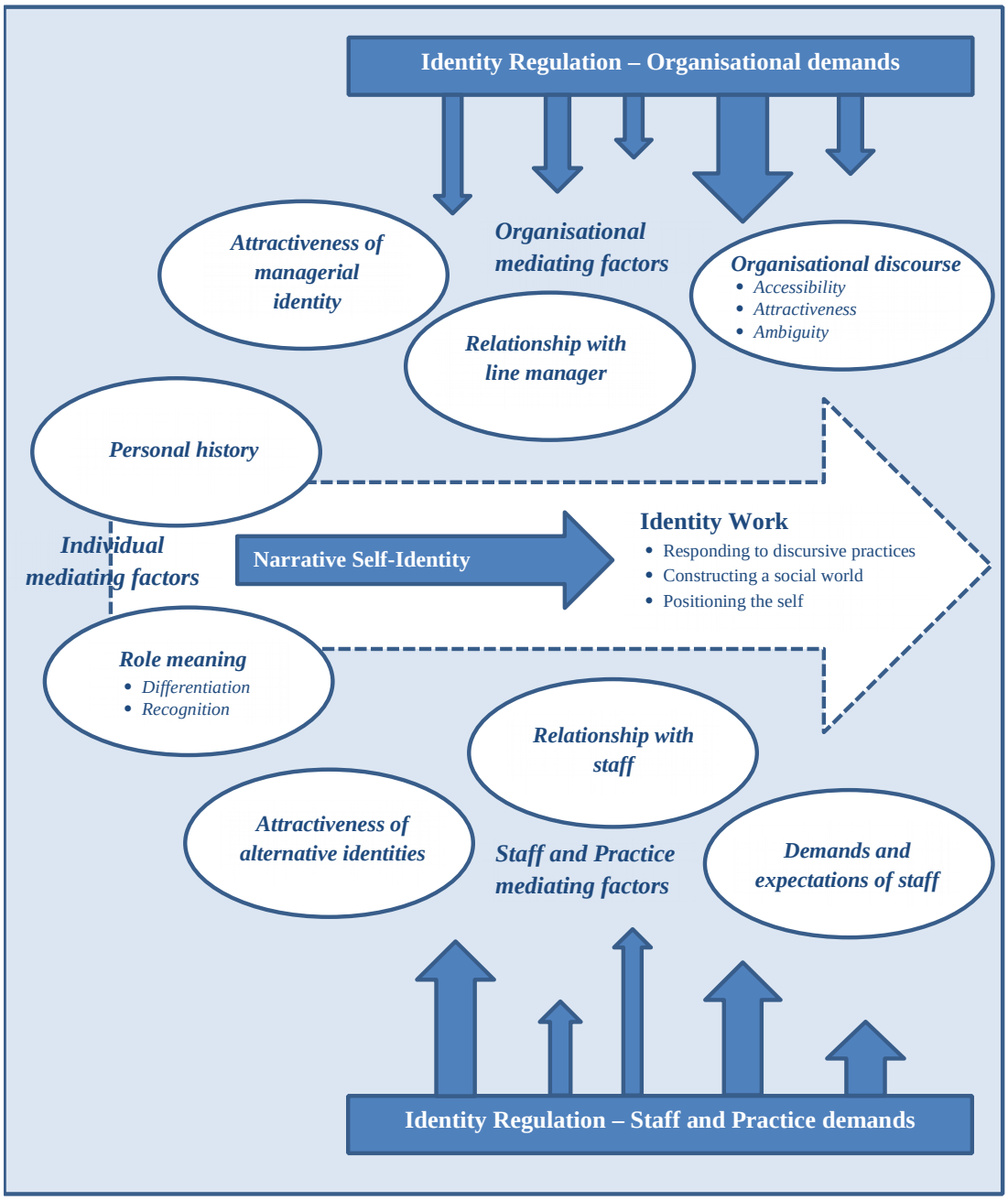


**Figure 23 – An integrative model of medial manager identity**

Building on a Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) concept of mythical thought, in which self-narrative is understood as both selectively constructing a social world and tracing a path through that social world, analysis of Panorama manager stories and texts have identified and demonstrated three interdependent but distinct processes of identity work (section 8.2.2). Managers selectively recognised and responded to competing demands and possible identifications: to be a manager in the service of the organisation; to be a practitioner; and to be a member of the team or service area. Managers interpreted their organisational world by selectively constructing it across

vertical, horizontal, internal or external dimensions; and managers constructed personal positions within such constructed organisations and with the possible subject positions available to them. Understanding identity work as these three distinct, but interdependent, processes both reveals and helps to interpret the diverse workplace identities that managers construct and the diverse ways in which they construct such identities.

Finally the model proposes that these three processes of identity work are mediated by a number of factors which may serve to afford and/or constrain medial manager identity work. These are categorised as factors relating to perceptions of the organisation, perceptions of staff and practice, and perceptions of self. A number of key points should be noted about these factors. First of all, each factor itself is neither necessarily an affordance nor a constraint, but may act as either. Second, it is proposed that most, if not all factors will mediate the identity work of medial managers to a greater or lesser degree. Third, mediating factors should be interpreted within the context of the continual dynamic between narrative self-identity, identify regulation and identity work. The effects of organisational mediating factors are partially determined by the organisational context, for example, the strength and nature of particular organisational discourses or the nature of a particular group of staff. That is, they are partially determined by the nature of particular discursive practices or identity regulation. However, the effects of such organisational mediating factors are also determined by the manager's narrative self-identity and the identity work that they are able to undertake: for example the ways in which managers accept or seek to re-work or resist particular discourses or exploit ambiguous spaces are also informed by the manager's current understanding of themselves as a narrative self over time, and the particular forms of identity work that they undertake in order to sustain a sense of a consistent narrative self in the context of such discourses and their interpretation of their wider discursive context. Similarly, the effects of personal mediating factors such as previous experience and the extent of need for differentiation or recognition are associated with and partially determined by the manager's narrative self-concept, but also by the particular organisational context: for example the extent to which the manager's own values or understanding of their role is reflected by – or perceived to be reflected by – the organisation.

The mediating factors should therefore be understood not as representing or determining causality, but as key points of interaction and refraction within the dynamic between narrative self-identity, identity regulation and identity work. The purpose of the model is not to predict the effects of particular discursive practices, nor to predict particular identities that might be constructed. Its purpose is to provide an interpretive framework which maps out the various processes and factors at play within the particular context of the medial manager, and is able to interpret the particular identities that medial managers are found to construct. Moreover, the model, and particularly the mediating factors, is a reflection of the particular context of social housing and specifically the context of one social landlord, Panorama Housing. Although the model provides an initial framework, future research into manager identity in other organisational contexts will further help to refine the model: for example, to establish whether these mediating factors remain significant, and to what extent, whether these mediating factors can be further elaborated and conceptualised, and whether further, distinct mediating factors can be identified.

## 8.3 'In-between': Interpreting medial manager positioning

The integrative model of medial manager identity (figure 23) is proposed as a model of the 'undercurrents' of processes which form the 'surface wave' of medial manager responses to their organisational position 'in-between' through the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity (Ashforth, et al., 2008). In this section the value of the model is demonstrated by applying it to the 'seven ways to be a medial manager' identified and characterised in section 7.3, and using it to further explore and interpret each position. The research set out to uncover the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association, and specifically to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible. By applying the model to each of the seven 'ways of being a manager' described by Panorama managers, insight into the particular ways in which managers constructed differing positions, and possible reasons for those processes, can be gained.

### 8.3.1 Champions, Practitioners and Practitioner-Managers: challenging the organisation

Champions (Varley), Practitioners (Dawson and Kendall) and Practitioner-Managers (Bailey, Hancock, Jennings and Newton) are all characterised by drawing on alternatives to the subject position of being a manager in the service of the organisation, either as direct alternatives (Champions and Practitioners) or as a means of interpreting a manager subject position (Practitioner-Managers).

All seven managers demonstrate the significance of staff and practice mediating factors for constructing an interpretation of a medial manager position. They draw strongly on their expertise and experience in constructing workplace identities and an organisational position. Of the Practitioner-Managers, Bailey and Newton both told stories which constructed them as having expert insight which enables them to identify less obvious or hidden customer needs; Jennings told a story based on being the one individual, coming from outside the organisation, who understands the importance of their service area for the organisation and successfully making its case; and Hancock's story of "getting my manager's money" is as a result of demonstrating their expertise in helping the organisation gain an accreditation. Dawson and Kendall, characterised as Practitioners, both construct themselves as experienced practitioners possessing valuable skill-sets; and although Varley's primary identification is with their team as their Champion, they nevertheless also draw on their experience and expert judgement, both to determine which "battles" to take up on behalf of staff and to justify their challenging of senior management decisions. For these managers, their years of experience and training in their operational area is also a significant factor in their personal history; and their expert practice offers an attractive complementary or even alternative identity as a manager in the service of the organisation. For example, Newton sees an important aspect of their manager role as helping their staff to remember the professional values that give meaning to their service:

> *If you think what the principle means, you think well how can I put that into practise, that's the bit that I like and enjoy because that's requiring a bit more creativity, it's requiring, not just doing it myself, it's about selling that vision to other staff who work very hard to get through the day-to-day [ ] and you want it not to be boring and tedious for them, so - you want to try and*

> *give them an understanding of the true value of what they do actually...it is about keeping it fresh for people.* – Newton, team leader

All seven managers also describe significant identification with their staff. Varley's text gives weight to the needs and concerns of their team, and constructs an organisational role around listening to, assessing and acting on such concerns: "I tend to try, with the one-to-ones, collate the information as best I can so that I get...a strong impression from the team as to...where I'm going to take the fight, ha' (Varley, team leader). Kendall similarly claims to recognise and respect the needs of their team and particularly their reluctance to undertake new responsibilities. Bailey, Hancock, Jennings and Newton all express strong identification with their teams based on the nature of their work and shared values as to its importance: "my team believe in what they do, they believe in what outcomes we're trying to achieve... it is about helping people as much as we can" (Bailey, service manager); "so there is a real kind of camaraderie and we are very much - we are the [service area] and - nobody messes with us!" (Jennings, service manager); while Dawson identifies with their team's work and outcomes as their own.

A number of these managers also demonstrate the role of individual mediating factors through constructing positions of difference: Jennings as the one with particular knowledge in competition with other, better recognised service areas; Hancock similarly as one who has had to struggle to justify the value of their service and themselves in order to achieve the organisation's commitment to being a social business; Varley as the one who is in potential conflict with senior managers who have power but no knowledge; and Bailey and Newton as ones who manage a "slightly different" service (Bailey, service manager) for a particular type of customer which the organisation does not fully recognise or understand. However, some differences in the degree and extent of differentiation may be observed. Varley and Jennings suggest a strong drive to differentiate: they draw on their expertise to contrast themselves with others in the organisation, but they also act to promote their expert perspectives and seek to enact change, by gaining recognition of their service and its needs. In contrast, Bailey, Hancock and Newton all describe the organisation as sharing their own values and ethos of customer focus: their difference is being able to better fulfil it through expertise and establishes a particular and valuable role in and contribution towards the organisation. For Dawson and Kendall,

differentiation is personal: they fulfil an important position which the organisation recognises, but they do not actively seek to challenge organisational decisions, activities or values. This latter contrast is also informed by the extent and ways in which managers respond to organisational discourses of management. Neither Dawson nor Kendal draw on such discourses in their texts: Kendall constructs a stratified hierarchy in which degrees of responsibility are clearly delineated, with their role being to raise issues with their manager but to only act on their manager's instruction; while Dawson draws on alternative discourses of staff involvement and a shared organisational purpose to overwrite any need for managerial activities. Organisational discourses of management are more significant in other manager texts: for example, drawing on selected discourses to construct themselves as particular kinds of managers who are competent to take decisions (Varley) or to manage the resources of a service which will deliver organisational objectives (Jennings, Hancock); recognising the organisational importance of performance management albeit sometimes seeking to reinscribe it within a practitioner framework: "you could turn that on its head and say a PI can only give you the information to help you improve" (Bailey, service manager); and seeking to promote the organisational values to staff and tenants: "It's about thinking it through with people sometimes when we talk about values, you know, what does that mean in real life" (Newton, team leader). This suggests that one key mediating factor which differentiates between certain interpretations of the medial manager position is the accessibility and perceived attractiveness of a managerial identity.

### 8.3.2 Buffers and Instruments: defending the organisation

Buffers (Fleming, Miller and Woods) and Instruments (Irwin, Long and Reed) both reflect a strong identification with the organisation. A key difference is that a Buffer interpretation of the medial manager position also includes significant identification with staff; but both are characterised by an acceptance of the organisation's values and decision-making and an unwillingness to challenge them.

In contrast to the Champions, Practitioners and Practitioner-Managers discussed above, organisational mediating factors feature prominently in these manager texts. In particular, all six managers refer to significant and positive relationships with their own line manager. For Fleming, Reed and Woods their own managers represent mentors who have supported or promoted them and who inspire personal loyalty.

Long willingly models themselves on their line manager's approach to conducting staff one-to-ones; Irwin values the authoritative support offered by their manager, and Miller similarly values their manager's expertise and open management style. These managers also drew strongly and positively on organisational discourses such as being a business, continuous improvement, customer focus and social responsibility in order to demonstrate their commitment to and alignment with organisational values: for example, all six managers spoke about valuing working in an organisation that was continuously changing and improving: "I think that is part of the attraction, for me really, because it's kept my interest...we are always looking to improve and always changing the way we do things and try and improve" (Long, team leader). More widely these managers also described themselves as feeling personal commitment towards the organisation because it fitted with their personal values: "I've made no sort of secret over where I want to be within the organisation. I'd like to stay here because I do like it" (Fleming, service manager); "Well-being, employee well-being and satisfaction is a massive driver of this organisation... and I think that's a very, a very positive step that this organisation has taken, and that's something that I feel quite proud of" (Miller, team leader).

The key difference between a Buffer and Instrument interpretation of the medial manager position is the extent of identification with staff. The drivers for this identification differ for each manager describing a Buffer interpretation: for Fleming there was recognition of the damage done to staff morale through the 'villainy' of former manager actions; Miller's identification with the challenges their staff face informs their self-construction as one who has expert knowledge as a practitioner; and Woods, another former practitioner, is also concerned with maintaining social capital in order to maintain appropriate staffing levels. However, while these managers recognise staff interests as differing from organisational ones and therefore as something to be managed, their responses are different to those of Champions, Practitioners or Practitioner-Managers in that they do not directly offer any challenge to organisational interests, either by seeking to oppose organisational decisions (Champions), re-inscribe organisational discourses (Practitioner-Managers) or through by-passing organisational interests and expectations (Practitioners). Rather, they maintain commitment to organisational interests by keeping concern with staff

interests as separate. In this way they are similar to managers describing an Instrument interpretation, who either do not refer to or who downplay staff interests.

A common factor in the described personal histories of all six managers constructing Buffer or Instrument interpretations was a recent significant change to their workplace role. For Fleming, Miller, Reed and Woods this was being appointed to their first managerial role in the organisation (and for some, their first management role) and all four both managers reflected on the need to negotiate and establish a particular relationship with their team and the organisation, understanding and fulfilling organisational expectations of them, and, for first-time managers, establishing a new role which was distinct from being a team member. Irwin and Long had both been in their team leader roles for many years, but both referred to recent changes as a result of organisational re-structures and new and increasing responsibilities and expectations on them as team leaders within a discourse of manager responsibility: "It's evolved now... the scope of the job's completely different. Where we were more hands on at the time, we haven't got time to do the hands on bits now" (Irwin, team leader). All six managers therefore described potentially precarious identities which were either new or in transition, and this may help to explain their organisational positioning. Aligning themselves with a strong organisation through adopting a managerial identity offers such managers a powerful resource to make sense of their organisational position, but its precarious or provisional nature also means such managers may be reliant on the organisation, and particularly their line manager to provide support and direction, and may preclude managers from seeking to offer any direct challenge to the organisation and its interests. Instead they manage staff and organisational interests separately, maintaining different 'faces' to each (the Buffer interpretation) or may rely on the organisation's position to implement decisions. Irwin relies on their organisational authority to implement decisions: "there's a point where you ask them to do it, you expect them to do it"; while Long accepts organisational changes as positive over staff and practitioner perspectives, and Reed's text contains no reference to potential organisational tensions. A Buffer or Instrument interpretation of the medial manager position may therefore serve as a possible – perhaps even necessary – transition process for managers undertaking new roles or responsibilities.

### 8.3.3 Integrators and Visionaries: embodying the organisation

Managers describing an Integrator (Abbott, Everett, Goddard, Oakley, Potter and Shaw) or Visionary (Chapman and Taylor) interpretation of the medial manager position similarly reflect a strong identification with the organisation. However, whereas Buffer or Instrument interpretations may be characterised as the loyal but vicarious instrument of the organisation, the texts of these managers construct them as personally embodying the organisation and seeking to create engagement and alignment with its interests and values.

Like the Buffer and Instrument interpretations, organisational mediating factors are particularly significant for managers constructing an Integrator or Visionary position. However, three particular organisational mediating factors may be seen from the texts of these Panorama managers as being significant in distinguishing them from a Buffer or Instrument interpretation. The first is the attractiveness of a managerial identity over other possible identities. All the managers describing an Integrator or Visionary interpretation also had extensive practitioner experience and expertise, but while these identities and discourses were not absent from their texts, these managers also drew on a managerial identity as a positive and distinct identity in itself, and as a distinct role and skill set: for example "it's trying to get the best out of people, trying to persuade people...I think the skill is, you try to get the best for the staff, you try to get the best out of staff" (Oakley, team leader), while other managers talked about being able to initiate and change and drive forward improvements: "Something I enjoy is transformation, not for transformation's sake obviously, [but] for a known benefit, and seeing this from start to finish" (Everett, operations director). Managers reflecting an Integrator or Visionary interpretation are able to construct a managerial identity as a clear and positive choice rather than as a new or provisional one. The second and third factors are the accessibility of organisational discourse and organisational identification, and the attractiveness of such discourses, which enable the manager to actively promote them and seek to engage and align staff with them. Whereas managers describing Buffer or Instrument interpretations drew on organisational discourses to construct meaning for themselves but made limited or no references to referred to promoting them to staff, these managers describe seeking to make the case to staff rather than simply implementing decisions. As Potter puts it:

> *You know, managing, if you're, say, team manager it can be...very generic, it can be about like managing data, managing this - but I think leading, when you're talking about people is about taking the people with you, it's not just telling them what you want them to do, it's them wanting to do it with you*. – Potter, team leader

A Visionary interpretation of the medial manager position may be seen as a further extension of such willingness to engage with others and make a persuasive case, not only with staff but with the organisation itself. Although any interpretation based on just two texts can only be tentative, individual mediating factors and particularly the drive for differentiation may be significant in understanding the difference between managers who align themselves and engage fully with the organisation, its vision and values, and those who seek to influence and transform the organisation itself.

## 8.4 'In-between' organisational tensions: Implications for organisations

The previous sections have demonstrated how the research makes a number of theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge. This final section sets out the research's potential value for organisations, by contextualising the findings within the "routine activities that characterise much organisational life" (Coupland & Brown, 2012, p. 2) and by demonstrating how the research has produced "actionable knowledge" (Voronov, Wolfram Cox, LeTrent-Jones, & Weir, 2009) for non-academic practitioners (Ainsworth & Grant, 2012). The section presents a number of potential applications which the research may have for organisational practice: providing a means of interpreting manager behaviours as identity work in the context of the medial manager 'in-between'; revealing and analysing particular identity challenges for managers; and highlighting the potential value of organisational plurality and dissensus as revealed through manager experience and identity work.

### 8.4.1 Interpreting medial manager behaviours as identity work

The first possible application of the research for organisational practice is to develop a practical tool for making sense of manager behaviours. The concept of the medial manager has been proposed, which characterises the manager who both manages others and is managed themselves, and conceptualises the position in terms of identity. The research proposed two dimensions of medial manager identity: the

multiple possible identifications available to the medial manager as a consequence of their organisational position 'in-between'; and the degree of agency afforded medial managers by such multiple identifications and potentially competing organisational interests to make individual responses. The research has proposed, and demonstrated through empirical data, that medial managers are subject to potentially competing identity claims: to be a manager in the service of the organisation, to be a practitioner in the service of operational delivery or to be a member and representative of the staff team they manage; and that medial managers may adopt recognisably different positions within the organisation depending on the ways in which they recognise, respond to and manage such identity claims. Through a close analysis of the self-presentations of medial managers in the context of a research interview, the research has identified seven distinct ways of interpreting the medial manager position, based on identifying which subject position(s) are of primary significance for the medial manager or which are prioritised, and on the extent to which managers recognised competing organisational interests and the ways in which they responded to and managed such interests. While these are not proposed as a generalisable typology they demonstrate the wide range of ways in which twenty one managers working within organisation may interpret a similar organisational position, and in particular, how such different interpretations are not dependent upon the hierarchical level at which the medial manager operates.

Such interpretations have practical consequences for organisations. Medial managers represent, for those they manage, a potential explanatory function: they are a reference point for others to extract sensemaking cues to make sense of and to organise their social worlds (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010; Pye, 2005; Thurlow & Helms Mills, 2009). The personal sense that medial managers make from competing organisational claims and discourses on them creates potential social and organisational realities for those around them. For example, a manager's willingness to raise staff concerns and to challenge senior manager decisions, or their unwillingness to support and promote an organisational decision may mean perceptions of differences of interest between staff and the organisation being subtly reinforced (Haslam, 2004; Holden & Roberts, 2004), or may create dis-alignment between operational delivery and executive objectives and strategy. Organisations are therefore likely to find certain manager interpretations and positionings

problematic and perhaps symptomatic of less talented, less committed or less effective managers. Indeed, this only reflects an assumption within much management literature that there is a 'right way' for managers to act, and that managers who fail to act in the organisation's best interests are either incompetent or deliberately acting to serve their own interests (see for example Lee & Taylor, 2014). However, the medial manager conceptualisation and the research underpinning it interprets such manager positionings as different but explicable responses to organisational realities. By revealing and drawing attention to the competing subject positions impinging on managers, and the range of resources available to them in order to make sense of their organisational positions, the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity offers organisations a way of identifying and interpreting different manager behaviours and understanding some of the likely drivers of such behaviours. In particular the conceptualisation of medial manager identity serves as a reminder for organisations (and researchers) that organisational roles are not objective sets of functions but are also occupied and enacted by a post-holder; and that they are discursively constructed by multiple and sometimes competing expectations which the post-holder must make personal sense of (Mantere, 2008; McGivern, et al., 2015). The subsequent sections further explore the ways in which the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity and the empirical findings of the research might be applied to organisational practice.

### 8.4.2 Understanding medial manager identity challenges

Analysis of the identity work of Panorama managers using the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity has revealed a number of particular common challenges facing managers which cue and influence identity work and the ways in which managers construct and adopt organisational positionings.

First, the texts of Panorama managers reveal recognition of multiple subject positions and possible workplace identities, to be managers in the service of the organisation, expert practitioners, or members and representatives of their staff team or service area; and recognition of these as potentially competing interests requiring negotiation or management (section 7.2). This finding is significant given that Panorama Housing is an organisation with a strong and relatively consistent organisational culture which appears, based on seven months of observations, to be reflected amongst many staff as well as managers, and with reported high levels of

employee engagement based on national benchmarks. Indeed it has been noted that there was very little overt criticism of senior or executive management or the organisation either observed or reported during interviews (section 6.3.2). The research therefore further supports the extant literature which understands being managers as being 'in the middle', and subject to competing expectations and interests which are not necessarily resolvable (*e.g.* Clarke, et al., 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2005; McConville & Holden, 1999; Sims, 2003; Watson, 1997): but the research also highlights how such tensions and different interests are not restricted to organisations experiencing significant change or internal conflict, but are also part of the fabric of a relatively stable organisation with high levels of staff engagement and satisfaction. Moreover, whereas much literature has focused on the function of the 'middle manager' as being particularly subject to such competing claims and interests, the empirical evidence from Panorama finds manager interview texts recognising and describing operating within such tensions across hierarchical levels, from team leaders or first-level managers, through service managers to operations directors reporting to the Executive Board. Indeed, first-level managers (team leaders) may be seen as being particularly subject to such tensions and competing identity claims because they work more closely with staff, becoming familiar with their needs and interests, and also represent the immediate face of the organisation to them (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Coupland, et al., 2005; Huy, 2002; Seijts & Roberts, 2011). The research therefore supports calls for first-level managers to be recognised as key organisational actors (Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Lloyd & Payne, 2014) whose role and experience have been neglected to date (Down & Reveley, 2009; Musson & Duberley, 2007). The research also provides further evidence of both the practical challenges facing medial managers in their position 'in-between' and the contextual and fragile nature of manager identity (Harding, et al., 2014; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002). It further demonstrates, through the close analysis of manager stories and interview texts, the extensive, complex and diverse forms of identity work undertaken by managers in response to such competing claims and in relation to their own reflexively understood self-identities. In other words, the research has demonstrated that the tensions and competing demands which have been typically seen as applying to middle managers may also be common to managers at all levels who are 'in-between' those whom manage and are managed by; and, by framing the medial

manager position from an identity perspective, it has demonstrated that the possible responses of managers to such tensions and competing demands are diverse and multiple.

Second, and building on the first, the research reveals how a manager's organisational position may offer possible alternative identities to a managerial one. Many managers at Panorama recognised possible identities as expert practitioners, which may be perceived as safer and more secure sources of personal power and status (Austin, et al., 2013; Croft, et al., 2015; McConville & Holden, 1999); and professionals undertaking managerial duties may struggle to integrate potentially competing demands and discourses (Gleeson & Knights, 2008; Iedema, et al., 2004; Pratt & Corley, 2007; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005). For many managers at Panorama their professional practice and expertise remained a key resource for constructing a workplace identity and organisational position, including giving meaning to their work through achieving outcomes for customers, providing a source of authority from which to deal with staff or the organisation, and providing a means of differentiation through unique knowledge or skills; and managers who deliberately constructed alternative managerial identities such as Oakley and Reed nevertheless recognised the need to resolve a lack of expertise. Manager stories and texts also suggested that maintaining strong relationships with staff may also offer attractive identities: as their active representative and leader (Varley), as one who can distribute small favours (Woods) or through a shared group identity (Dawson, Long). In the context of competing expectations, interests and identity claims the research offers a clear reminder that a workplace identity as a manager in the service of the organisation is not the only possible identity available to managers, nor necessarily the easiest or most attractive one to construct and maintain.

The role of practice in particular for medial managers at Panorama suggests that more attention should be paid to this aspect of manager work and identity. For many managers who have been promoted within a team or service area, expertise in a professional practice represents something that was previously their primary role, which they likely excelled in (Austin, et al., 2013) and with which they may retain a strong emotional attachment (Croft, et al., 2015). It may also form an important construct for maintaining relationships with a former team through continuing identification with a shared practice (Croft, et al., 2015; Lloyd & Payne, 2014).

There has been an increased interest in the phenomenon of the 'hybrid' (N. Burgess & Currie, 2013; Horton, et al., 2014; McGivern, et al., 2015) which may offer further insight into the tensions experienced by medial managers. Hybrids are commonly thought of as professionals who have become responsible for managing professional and other staff (McGivern, et al., 2015) but may be more widely understood as representing identities or roles which would not normally be expected to go together (Horton, et al., 2014). Many of the insights from studies of hybrid roles, which tend to focus on the need to maintain the exclusivity of a profession in a managerial context (McGivern, et al., 2015), have relevance for, and echo the wider phenomenon of medial managers, including the context of operating within and having to negotiate competing institutional logics (for example, between customer outcomes and organisational performance); the need to make sense of multiple logics and to construct a meaningful position which both protects and speaks to different logics and different constituents; and the ways in which hybrids adopt different personal responses in such complex situations, from acting as a shield for professional practice to reinscribing managerial discourses and practices to create alignment and integration (Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Horton, et al., 2014; Iedema, et al., 2004; McGivern, et al., 2015). Whilst studies of hybrid managers draw particular attention to the identity work involved in managing professional and managerial identities, this research suggests the possibility that such hybrids merely represent an extreme example of the medial manager position, and that the issues and challenges faced by such hybrid managers may be more intense, but are not unusual. Indeed, the research findings suggest that medial managers may be thought of as forms of hybrids, in their position between competing interests and competing subject positions.

Third, and relatedly again, the research has highlighted the drive for managers to construct workplace identities which establish a differentiated or unique organisational position. This is significant in the context of the literature suggesting that the role of managers is to create alignment and synergy between executive strategy and decisions above them and operational delivery and staff below them (Corley, 2004; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999). Even within the context of strong organisational discourses of collective involvement and shared responsibility, within their interview texts

managers sought to distinguish themselves in various ways: from other teams or service areas, from their peers, or from organisational levels above and below them. In particular, seven team leaders (Goddard, Irwin, Kendall, Miller, Oakley, Potter and Varley) explicitly sought to differentiate their role in terms of constructing a distinct organisational level and role, contrasting themselves both with their staff and their own line manager: for example as one who blends operational expertise – in contrast to their line manager – with willingness to change and develop – in contrast to their team (Goddard) or as one who provides a necessary bridge between the team and a wider organisational perspective (Potter) or informational link (Kendall). Individuals typically seek what Brewer (1991, 2003) calls 'optimal distinctiveness' through balancing needs for social inclusion and similarity, and individuation and uniqueness; and Ashforth and colleagues (2011) propose that a strong collective identity may actually therefore prompt efforts to distinguish the self in other ways. Organisational expectations of medial managers to create alignment between organisational strategy and operational delivery through staff therefore need to consider the need for medial managers to have a distinctive and recognised organisational role, rather than simply acting as the oil between two components. The research also suggests some further support for research proposing that managers may feel vulnerable or threatened in contexts where there are few organisational layers and their subordinates and superiors may work closely together (Pedersen & Hartley, 2008; A. G. Sheard & Kakabadse, 2007; Warhurst, 2011). Behaviour such as insisting that information between subordinates and superiors goes through them (A. G. Sheard & Kakabadse, 2007) may be not simply about accumulating power but constructing a differentiated and meaningful role within the organisation.

Finally, the research has highlighted the ways in which the multiplicity of management functions and possible subject positions gives managers considerable scope to be able to construct workplace identities which have personal meaning (Foster, 2012). Kira and Balkin (2014) argue that too often researchers focus on identity work as a way of aligning self-identity to a job, rather than the ways in which individuals are able to 'craft' a job to align with a self-identity. The research has strongly supported this argument: from the choice of manager stories which included major long-term projects, daily work, managing staff needs and personal

progression (section 6.3.1); to plot structure and narrative roles which construct the manager and others in different ways (section 6.3.2, section 6.3.3); to ways in which managers constructed their organisational world across vertical, horizontal, internal or external tensions and which foreground and privilege certain functions and relationships (section 6.4.1); to constructing distinctive positions in response to competing identifications and possible subject positions (section 7.3). Although managers are subject to multiple forms of organisational identity regulation (section 2.8) and may be subject to sustained organisational efforts to create a certain type of employee and manager as at Panorama Housing (section 6.2) they nevertheless retain considerable scope to interpret their organisational position and to privilege certain functions and relationships in individual and personal ways. In other words the research has highlighted the "mutually constitutive" (Watson, 2008, p. 129) nature of identity work, and the extent to which self-identity can act on their social environment as well as being acted upon: the ways in which medial managers construct an organisational role as well as being constructed by role expectations (Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

### 8.4.3 Medial manager identity: the value of dissensus

Finally, this section offers an important caveat to the assumption that management should simply be about executing operational strategy. The research has developed a conceptual model of medial manager identity and has been able to characterise seven distinct ways in which Panorama medial managers interpreted their organisational position 'in-between' multiple subject positions within their interview texts; and section 8.4.1 further noted that some positions such as the Champion who acts to represent and defend their team or service, or the Practitioner who seeks to construct an alternative, non-managerial identity, might be considered especially problematic by organisations as symptomatic of less talented, committed or effective managers. However, by reading such manager behaviours in terms of identity work in the context of multiple and competing subject positions, the research has demonstrated that such manager positions can be understood as different but explicable responses to organisational realities. Moreover, the existence of managers who position themselves in such ways draw attention to the existence of multiple perspectives and interests within the organisation (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). As Whittle and colleagues (2014) note, research is not neutral, and research findings may be

interpreted and put to uses by managers and organisations that were neither intended nor envisaged by the researcher. The findings of this research might be interpreted by some organisations – and scholars – as offering a toolkit for creating the 'right sort' of manager, such as an Integrator interpretation. However, it may equally be interpreted as a toolkit for organisations to better identify and understand, through the existence of alternative medial manager positions, the heteroglossia of discourses which may be hidden beneath hierarchical privilege and hegemonic dominance (Brown, 2006; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005) and the existence of competing discourses (Clarke, et al., 2009; Iedema, et al., 2004). Rather than seeking to achieve consensus by creating managers in the organisation's image, organisations might equally seek creative dissensus by being open to alternative perspectives, interests and concerns which may be reflected in the identity work and organisational positionings of medial managers. Identity conflicts and alternative institutional logics may be the drivers of organisational change (Horton, et al., 2014) and those who are positioned between competing logics, interests and professions are often able to generate creative ways to sustain consensus between different interests and concerns (Oldenhof, et al., 2013) or bring together different bodies of knowledge to new situations (N. Burgess & Currie, 2013). Indeed, such an interpretation reinforces the pivotal role of the medial manager – at any level – within the organisation as a custodian of different interests and perspectives; it might be argued that medial managers may be most effective and most valuable to an organisation when they (individually or collectively) are able to reflect these multiple interests and perspectives. The medial manager might be characterised as the Janus manager who faces both ways, and is required to speak to, and to speak for, both (Sims, 2003).

## 8.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the third and concluding findings chapter in which the contributions of the research for understanding identity and for understanding managers, and potential applications for organisational practice, are discussed. Following a brief review of the key findings from a narrative and paradigmatic analysis of medial manager stories (chapter 6) and analysis of the key discourses and subject positions which medial managers recognised and responded to in their interview texts (chapter 7), the chapter has further built on these findings to develop

two theoretical contributions. First, the Levi-Straussian mythical conceptualisation of narrative identity work has been integrated with the empirical data presented in chapters 6 and 7 to develop a model of identity work which explains the complex interplay of ways in which managers construct themselves as three distinct but inter-dependent phases of identity work. Second, the chapter presented a meta-analysis of the findings so far presented, in order to identify the key affordances and constraints at play in medial manager identity work, and presented an original and integrative model of medial manager identity work which both maps out the key processes of medial identity work and provides a means of interpreting how and why medial managers adopt different organisational positions in response to their position 'in-between'. This integrative model has been put forward as a model of the 'undercurrents' of processes which form the 'surface wave' of medial manager responses to their organisational position 'in-between' (Ashforth, et al., 2008). The value of the integrative model has been illustrated by further analysis and interpretation of the range of different ways of being a manager described within the Panorama manager texts. The chapter has therefore addressed research objective 5: *To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work*. Finally the chapter has set out a number of contributions which the research makes both to our understanding of management and the role of medial managers, and potentially for organisational practice.

# Chapter 9 – Conclusions

## 9.1 Introduction

This research set out to investigate the processes of identity work undertaken by managers in a UK Housing Association. Specifically the aim was to understand processes of identity work in the context of the manager's position 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to whom they are responsible.

In order to clarify and focus the scope of the research a number of objectives have been set out in chapter 1:

1 To review the broad and complex terrain of identity studies and to establish the particular theoretical position adopted by the research;
2 To fully theorise and conceptualise the position of the manager 'in-between';
3 To uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles through story elicitation, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles;
4 To understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims;
5 To understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work.

This chapter initially presents conclusions to each of these research objectives, by discussing the findings presented in chapters 6, 7 and 8, and contextualising and synthesising them with the literature discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Following on from this, the chapter identifies and discusses the key contributions which the research makes. Finally the chapter critically reviews and reflects on the research process and its limitations, and sets out possible future directions for further research.

## 9.2 Key findings from the research

### Review the broad and complex terrain of identity studies and establish the particular theoretical position adopted by the research

In order to investigate the identity work of managers in the context of being 'in-between' those whom they manage and the organisation to which they are responsible, the research needed to establish its theoretical foundations in two ways. First it needed to establish its particular understanding of identity. Chapter 2 acknowledged that the field of identity studies is vast, crossing multiple disciplines and including a wide range of theoretical models based on distinct and differing ontological and epistemological assumptions which nevertheless may also be complementary or related (Brown, 2015). The chapter defined identity as the means by which individuals and collectives understand and organise their place in the world, and the ways in which one perceives themselves as the same and as different to others (Brewer, 2003; Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Jenkins, 2008; Karreman & Alvesson, 2001; Kreiner, et al., 2006b). Drawing the work of Mead (1934) the chapter conceptualised identity as an internal-external dialectic between the individual (the self) and others (society) (Jenkins, 2008) and identified a range of features of identity which are commonly reflected across the field: as being multiple, relational, discursively constructed and ongoing. Building on the conceptualisation of identity as an internal-external dialectic the chapter set out three particular metaphors (Brown, 2015), or ways of framing identity which inform and underpin the research: identity work, narrative and mythical thought. Identity work focuses attention on the nature of the dialectic, or ongoing struggle between the self and the social (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Watson, 2008) as the process of constructing, revising, repairing and maintaining self-identity (the self as reflexively understood at any point in time) in the context of discursive social practices of identity regulation. The concept of identity work therefore fully acknowledges both the subjectivity of the individual who is positioned by discursive practices (identity regulation), and their agency in responding to, investing in and resisting such practices by forming, repairing and maintaining self-identity (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Collinson, 1994, 2006; Leonard, 2003; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005). Narrative is understood as the primary means by which identity work is accomplished, by providing a working account of the individual's life in terms of

unity and purpose, and which links the individual's past and future (Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; McAdams, 1985; Ricoeur, 1992; Sims, 2005b; Watson, 2009) through being able to organise and make sense of events in particular and socially recognisable ways (Czarniawska, 2004a; Gergen, 2001; Riessman, 2008). That is, self-identity is more specifically understood as narrative self-identity. Finally the Levi-Straussian (1963, 1983) concept of mythical thought further integrates the concepts of identity work and narrative, by expressing narrative as the means by which individuals both construct particular social worlds in response to discursive social practices, and establish a particular position within that social world.

The research has therefore established a clear theoretical position within the field of identity studies. Such a position has also established a firm theoretical foundation for the subsequent investigation into the identity work of managers in a housing association, by informing the method of data collection through story elicitation, the methods of data analysis through narrative and paradigmatic structural analysis and the interpretation of findings. That is, it has provided an effective way into the empirical data and a way into investigating specific processes of identity work, and ensured a consistent theoretical and methodological approach to the research.

**Fully theorise and conceptualise the position of the manager 'in-between'**

The second theoretical foundation that the research needed to establish and justify was the concept of the manager 'in-between'. Chapter 3 began by proposing and defining the concept of the 'medial manager' as any organisational actor who is both directly managed and who directly manages others. Such a conceptualisation of management does three things. First, it focuses attention on the nature of the pressures and subjectivities that the manager is *positioned* in-between, rather than the organisational position or level that the medial manager operates at: that is, medial manager describes a *state* rather than any particular grade or type of manager. The nature and pressure of the medial manager position is characterised as semi-autonomous and as being required to translate (Currie & Proctor, 2005) – interpret, convert and apply – executive strategy into something that can be realised operationally by others below them. That is, the state of the medial manager is to be 'in-between' the demands and expectations of the organisation above them, and those of staff they manage below them. Second, such a conceptualisation not only

deliberately avoids defining the manager by grade, but deliberately includes organisational actors at all organisational levels who both manage others and are themselves managed, from those who are responsible for non-managerial staff (commonly called team leaders, team managers or supervisors) through middle managers to senior managers who report to an executive group. That is, it is argued that the 'middleness' commonly investigated as applying to the classical 'middle manager' position is not a property of their hierarchical level but a state of being 'in-between'. This is further supported by literature which describes the ways in which organisations have been flattened, with management layers removed and increasing responsibilities devolved to team leaders and supervisors (*e.g.* Carter, et al., 2014; Hassard, et al., 2009; Holden & Roberts, 2004; Musson & Duberley, 2007). Third, the concept of the medial manager frames the nature of management as the business of identity, in being able to interpret and respond to the wants of others and to shape meanings, values and human commitments (Watson, 2000, 2001) and as the business of identity work, in both acting on and being acted upon by others (Harding, et al., 2014).

Having defined and justified the concept of the medial manager, chapter 3 went on to further conceptualise it in terms of identity. It argued that the medial manager may be understood primarily in terms of two dimensions: identification and agency. The dimension of identification draws both on the literature acknowledging the inherent tensions between organisational and staff interests in which staff are both human beings and business resources (Clarke, et al., 2009; Watson, 2008) and on insights from social identity theory which focuses attention on the ways in which identifications with particular social groups forms an important aspect of identity (Brewer, 2003; Hogg, 2001, 2003; Rousseau, 1998; Turner, 1975). Medial managers, whose role is translating executive strategy into operational meaning (Currie & Proctor, 2005), are subject to multiple possible subject positions and implied responsibilities, to the organisation whose decisions they are responsible for implementing, to the staff whose engagement and co-operation they require, and for the realities of operational practice. The dimension of identification therefore reflects the extent to which the medial manager identifies with, and constructs a self-identity based on identification with the organisation, or the staff team and/or practice. The dimension of agency draws on the issue discussed in chapter 2 of the

extent to which individuals are able to choose, construct and maintain identities, and the extent to which identities are subject to the effects of discursive and institutional practices. It proposes that the multiple and possible identifications available to the medial manager, and the contradictions inherent in the medial manager position, to be both an independent agent and loyal subject, (Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Holden & Roberts, 2004; McConville, 2006; McConville & Holden, 1999) and to draw on their operational experience to contribute towards executive intentions but only in prescribed ways (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; Hallier, 2004; Harding, et al., 2014), afford the medial manager some scope for agency in managing, sustaining or selecting between multiple and conflicting discourses and subject positions. This conceptualisation was therefore proposed as a heuristic and interpretative tool with which to frame the subsequent investigation into the identity work of medial managers.

**Uncover how managers personally understand their organisational roles, and the personal meanings that they attribute to their roles**

The research used a method of story elicitation as the basis for interviews with medial managers (chapter 5). The method was chosen firstly because it is consistent with a narrative understanding of identity, in which identity and identity work is accomplished primarily through stories about oneself and others, and secondly as a way of reducing the likelihood of premature framing of responses (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Flick, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In other words, the aim of the research was to elicit stories which would reflect the personal and individual ways in which managers understood themselves and their organisational roles, by giving managers the opportunity to present themselves in any way they wished (Humphreys & Brown, 2002).

Chapter 6 presented analysis and findings based on the stories told by medial managers. Even reading the stories simply at a surface and descriptive level the range of stories chosen by managers to represent or reflect their organisational roles was striking. Stories included major strategic and external projects such as leading a change management programme in response to government-driven change or a programme to deliver building works; long term internal projects such as reforming or developing a service area; fulfilling organisational tasks such as organising a

community event or system configuration; on-going and daily work such as managing the staff rota or assisting customers; extraordinary events such as an emergency flood or stock transfer; managing relationships with staff and managing staff needs and expectations; and stories of personal progress such as promotion and struggle for recognition. The choice of subject, such as delivering organisational objectives or managing relationships and the scope of the story, such as daily work or one-off events was not determined by organisational grade or service area. Such a range of stories highlights not so much the range of roles required of a manager but the range of different roles and functions that medial managers may choose to privilege when presenting themselves.

Chapter 6 went on to analyse the stories told by medial managers, and their interview texts read as narrative. It demonstrated the range of processes of identity work undertaken by stories. Plot analysis based on Propp (1968) (section 6.3.2) identified a range of different kinds of plot, as personal, dispatched or initiated quests in search of something lacking, as battles against a form of villainy or as existential struggle for recognition; and how different plots construct manager roles in different ways: as a state of 'being' or 'becoming' through personal quests or existential struggle; as 'doing' or acting on others to achieve goals, either as a loyal and capable servant through dispatched quests or as an experienced and capable agent through initiated quests; or as 'doing the right thing' in response to injustice through battles. Role analysis based on Propp (1968) (section 6.3.3) identified how managers both adopt roles themselves within their stories, often as hero but sometimes adopting other roles, and ascribe roles to other organisational actors within their stories. Role analysis reveals a range of insights into manager identity and identity work, including which other organisational actors are significant to the manager's presentation of their role and self-identity; the ways in which those others are constructed and positioned within manager self-presentations; and how managers construct themselves. In particular, role analysis of elicited manager stories of themselves reveals whether managers constructed themselves as taking action (as the hero of their own story) or as the facilitators of the work and actions of others (as supporting characters to other actors in a hero role), and the extent to which the manager's presented self-identity is dependent upon and embedded within their relationships with other organisational actors. Finally, paradigmatic analysis (Levi-

Strauss, 1963, 1983) identified a range of different ways in which managers constructed their organisational world within their interview talk: across vertical, horizontal, internal or external tensions; and how their chosen stories established an individual and mediating or intervening position within that constructed social world.

The method of story elicitation and structural analysis of both the managers' chosen stories and their interview texts as narrative has revealed the wide range of ways in which managers may understand and interpret their organisational roles, and the different personal meanings that managers may invest in their roles. Narrative analysis reveals some specific ways in which managers author themselves and others (Brown, 2006; Garcia & Hardy, 2007; Humphreys & Brown, 2002; Riessman, 2008): as heroes on personal or organisational quests or battling various forms of villainy; as donors, helpers or fathers to other organisational heroes; as loyal servants or as responsive agents. Narrative analysis also reveals the range of possible meanings of management for managers: as experienced practitioners (Bailey, Dawson, Newton) or as ones with expert knowledge (Miller, Varley); as embodying their service area and its mission and values (Hancock, Jennings) or the organisation (Abbott, Everett, Goddard); as bringing transforming personal vision (Chapman, Taylor); as a loyal servant of the organisation (Kendall, Long); as one who is responsible for supporting and managing staff (Potter, Oakley, Shaw); as one who has learned to become the right kind of manager (Fleming, Reed, Woods). It therefore reveals both the very different ways in which a manager role may be conceptualised and experienced, and the very personal ways in which managers make sense of such ambiguities through narrative (Hopkinson, 2003; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Paradigmatic analysis has similarly revealed not only the range of ways in which managers may construct an organisation, but the ways in which such constructions foreground and privilege certain roles, functions and relationships from which managers might construct self-identities: between staff and senior managers; between other teams and services; between the organisation and customers; or between values and ways of working. Managers further constructed different personal positions in response to similar organisational constructions: for example, in response to competing interests and tensions between staff and the organisation Fleming constructed a role as the 'insulator' who absorbs the pressure

from each; Varley described acting as the 'defender' of their team against senior manager decisions; Woods as flexing between organisational and staff interests as the 'bamboo manager'; and Oakley presented themselves as seeking to create alignment through developing their own management skills as the 'learning manager'. The range of role meanings, organisational constructions and positionings are highly individual and cut across service area and grade; moreover they were all presented by managers working in the same organisation and in similar, customer-facing services. The findings therefore strongly support the calls not to treat managers as homogeneous groups based on position, grade or industry (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Musson & Duberley, 2007; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002). In particular they reinforce the warning from Harding and colleagues (2014) not to rush to define and conceptualise the nature of the manager role, but to attend instead to the individual experiences and identity work of those occupying the role: to attend to the particulars of individual cases (Siggelkow, 2007) as well as seeking commonalities. It further reinforces the role of self-identity in identity work: despite the relatively strong and coherent discursive context of Panorama Housing, managers are not 'cultural dupes' (Garfinkel, 1967) or 'identikit managers', but agents who resist, engage with and re-work discursive resources in very individual ways, as well as being subjects of them (Brown, 2015; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Leonard, 2003; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005).

The method of story elicitation itself, combined with such structural analysis, has proved to be a highly effective way of revealing rich insights into manager experience, self-conception and identity work. The research has built on and extensively developed the analytical technique demonstrated by Gregg (2006) by actively eliciting stories from managers as acts of self-presentation, by incorporating analysis of roles as well as narrative functions, and by categorising forms of organisational construction, in addition to contextualising such analysis within an understanding of narrative identity work. As well as revealing the range and complexity of identity work accomplished by narrative, the method also offers what van Manen (1997, p. 116) calls an anecdote: "a methodological device in human science to make more comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" and (drawing on Aristotle) a poetic narrative which describes a universal truth. Stories told by managers about themselves offer a simple way for managers to say

something important about themselves (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) and for the listener to gain insight into the concrete and particular which underpins the more abstract and universal (van Manen, 1997). Moreover, by reading and analysing such stories as classic folk-tales using the narrative and role categories developed by Propp (1968) the method also enables the 'creative rupturing' (Sanger, 1996, p. 94) of participant discourse by the researcher, which is necessary to achieve new understandings.

**Understand the extent to which managers recognise their organisational role as being 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims**

The research proposed the concept of the medial manager as expressing the position of any organisational actor 'in-between' those whom they manage and those to whom they are themselves responsible (chapter 3). The twenty one managers at Panorama Housing all fitted such a definition of a medial manager (section 5.2.1). Chapter 7 discussed the findings in relation to the ways in which managers recognised and responded to such an organisational position 'in-between'.

The findings reveal a range of ways in which Panorama medial managers reflected and recognised their organisational position as 'in-between' and subject to multiple discursive claims. Medial manager texts reflected multiple subject positions (section 7.2.1). These included expectations to act as managers in the service of the organisation, to ensure operational delivery (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Herzig & Jimmieson, 2006; Seijts & Roberts, 2011) and/or as representing the organisation to staff (Holden & Roberts, 2004; Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003; Sims, 2003); to be a practitioner sensitive to the needs of customers and sources of expertise and experience (Alexiadou, 2001; Currie & Brown, 2003; R. Thomas & Davies, 2005; Waring & Currie, 2009); and finally as members of their service area or team, identifying with their team (Croft, et al., 2015; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Haslam, 2004; Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Rousseau, 1998) or recognising expectations to defend and protect staff from organisational demands and decisions (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; R. Jones & Kriflik, 2006; Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). The range of expectations and demands to which chapter 3 proposed that medial managers are subject were therefore reflected in the Panorama manager texts, and all manager texts recognised more than one potentially competing subject position, as a

manager and a practitioner and/or team member. Finally a number of managers explicitly referred to such a position in their talk, describing themselves as the "insulator" between "distrust downstairs and (pause) anxious nervousness upstairs" (Fleming), pressure being "filtered down" (Goddard), as being "peacemaker" and "negotiator" (Hancock), "the squeezed middle" (Jennings) or "squeezed every which way" (Varley), and "in the middle" (Oakley); or as being like "butter being spread over too much bread" (Miller) and continually putting on "different hats" (Abbott).

The findings therefore support the concept of the medial manager, as one 'in-between' those whom they manage and those to whom they are responsible, as reflective of manager experience. It not only supports and echoes research into middle managers being subject to competing organisational, staff and operational demands and expectations (*e.g.* Clarke, et al., 2009; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Holden & Roberts, 2004), but demonstrates that such competing pressures, or subject positions, may also be experienced by managers at other hierarchical levels. The findings therefore support the proposition made in chapter 3 that the position of the medial manager 'in-between' is a *state*, rather than any particular grade or function, and one which reflects a common experience of managers at all organisational levels. In particular the research supports those who draw attention to the contextual and fragile nature of manager identity and the challenges of identity work required by existing in a position which is subject to competing subject positions, demands and expectations (Carter, et al., 2014; Clarke, et al., 2009; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Harding, et al., 2014; Holden & Roberts, 2004; McConville & Holden, 1999; Sims, 2003; R. Thomas & Linstead, 2002; Watson, 1997).

However, the findings also draw attention to two areas which have been neglected within manager research. First, the research suggests that the roles of first level managers, commonly called team leaders or supervisors, deserve more attention as key organisational actors (*c.f.* Down & Reveley, 2009; Kilroy & Dundon, 2015; Lloyd & Payne, 2014; Musson & Duberley, 2007). Notwithstanding the increasing flattening of organisations and devolvement of management functions such as HR functions to the team leader level (Holden & Roberts, 2004; Huusko, 2006), the stories and talk of team leaders at Panorama also reveal the significance of the team leader's position 'in-between' the organisation and the staff they manage, and particularly as the immediate face of the organisation to staff (Alimo-Metcalfe &

Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Carter, et al., 2014; Coupland, et al., 2005; Croft, et al., 2015; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Huy, 2002; Seijts & Roberts, 2011). Oakley's story of an organisational restructure recognises the role of the team leader in maintaining a consistent organisational story during a difficult change process: "you've got to reel back what you say...it's just stopping and thinking about what you're actually doing, about looking at the wider implications...once you respond to one person it gets round" (Oakley, team leader). Woods' story of managing the rota reveals the everyday work of balancing staff and organisational interests, and the daily work of building and using social capital with staff; and the stories and texts of Goddard, Kendall, Miller, Potter and Varley also reflect the possible differences in perceptions between organisational and staff interests, and the need for the team leader to find ways of resolving those differences. Team leaders are revealed to be engaging in daily acts of "translating" executive strategy into operational realities (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Hales, 2005); the scope of their work may be less expansive than those of service managers or operations directors but it is no less significant. Paying more attention to the role of lower level managers, the demands placed on them and the ways in which they respond to and manage those demands will add to our understanding of organisational dynamics and the effectiveness of achieving strategies and objectives.

Second, the findings suggest that the role of practice, or technical expertise and experience, may be more significant for manager identity than previously acknowledged. Social housing is not an easily recognised or constructed profession as described by Abbott (1988) and Ashcraft (2013) (R. Casey, 2008); moreover, managers at Panorama Housing worked in specific areas of social housing such as managing customer contact or rent collection as well as the more generic work of letting and managing properties. Nevertheless, managers drew extensively on expertise and knowledge of their operational practice in a variety of ways. Managers commonly referred to their expertise and knowledge, based on years of personal experience, as being essential for managing and supporting staff by being able to provide guidance and direction based on personal knowledge: "I <u>know</u> the issues they face, I <u>know</u> the difficulties, I know the challenges" (Goddard, team leader). Expertise also provided many managers with a source of personal meaning and a key resource for constructing an identity, not only in being able to identify and respond

to the needs of customers but to be experts within the organisation who are essential for ensuring that the organisation is able to achieve its ambitions of fully assisting customers. Rather than being something that is difficult to let go of (Warhurst, 2011), or whose loss is a source of regret (McConville & Holden, 1999), most Panorama managers appeared to draw positively and creatively on their expert knowledge and practice as continuing sources of differentiation and positive meaning (R. Casey, 2008; Croft, et al., 2015; Foster, 2012). The conceptualisation of the medial manager as positioned 'in-between' both organisational demands and those of staff and/or practice highlights the likely significance of practice either as a direct personal construct or as a means of maintaining relationships with a team (Croft, et al., 2015; Lloyd & Payne, 2014) and a significant majority of Panorama managers recognised being a practitioner as a potential subject position in their texts. The research further (but more tentatively) suggests that the phenomenon of the 'hybrid manager' (N. Burgess & Currie, 2013; Horton, et al., 2014; McGivern, et al., 2015) with responsibilities to both management and a profession may reflect an extreme or intense example of the medial manager position.

**Understand the ways in which managers respond to multiple subject positions, and the interplay between personal understandings and the discursive context in which they work**

Sections 7.2.3 identified a range of tactics demonstrated by medial managers for managing multiple subject positions. Developing Roccas and Brewer's (2002) typology of multiple ingroup representations the research categorised tactics as intersection, in which the manager draws on selected features of different subject positions in order to construct an identity which is distinct from either; dominance of one subject position over another; compartmentalisation which involves switching between separate subject positions according to circumstance; and merger, in which links and synergies between subject positions are created, and multiple positions blended. Section 7.2.4 further identified a range of tactics for managing contested subject positions: distancing oneself from a contested position; countering a discourse with alternative ones; engaging with a discourse in order to create a personal version; and submission in which the subject position is (perhaps unconsciously) accepted.

Section 7.3 presented analysis of the medial manager interview texts in terms of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity developed in section 3.5. Analysis was based on manager responses within their interview texts to the three primary subject positions identified within their interview talk: the extent to which each was recognised and the ways in which each position, if recognised, was interpreted; the ways in which different subject positions were managed and contested; and the overall strength and significance of each subject position within the overall text. The section demonstrated how the twenty one Panorama medial managers could be characterised as reflecting seven distinct interpretations of the organisational position of the medial manager, and how the positionings described by medial managers were also informed by and reflected in the stories that they told and the identity work undertaken through them, and the use of identified strategies for managing multiple subject positions.

Chapter 8 presented the results of a meta-analysis of the research findings to identify key factors which afford or constrain the adoption of different medial manager positionings, and which were categorised as perceptions of the organisation, perceptions of staff and practice, and perceptions of the self. Key perceptions of the organisation included the relative strength, clarity and consistency of organisational discourse; the nature of the manager's relationship with their own line manager; and the perceived attractiveness of a managerial identification. Key perceptions of staff and practice included the nature and history of the relationship with the staff team, the extent of shared values and the perceived importance of maintaining good relationships with staff; the perceptions of staff demands upon them and the extent to which they are able or wish to fulfil those demands; and the attractiveness of alternative identities to a managerial one, including those of an expert practitioner and a staff representative. Perceptions of self included personal history and the nature of previous experience inside and outside the organisation; personal values and the extent to which they were congruent with perceptions of the organisation; and the need to differentiate and to construct an organisational position which has significance and is recognised as such. These factors are not presented as affordances or constraints in themselves, but as representing key points of interaction and refraction within the dynamic of identity work between self-identity and identity regulation.

A number of key implications arise out of these findings. First, the findings strongly support the validity of the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity, based on dimensions of identification and agency. As well as being able to demonstrate that Panorama medial manager talk reflected multiple possible subject positions, primarily to be a manager, a practitioner or a member of the team or service area, and that Panorama managers described a wide range of differing and individual responses towards different subject positions, resulting in identification of seven distinct interpretations of the medial manager position, or 'ways of being a manager', the research has also been able to show that the positioning of medial managers interpreted by the research is also reflected in the elicited stories that they chose to tell about themselves, and the identity work accomplished through those stories. This therefore forms a significant form of triangulation (Stake, 1995): medial manager self-presentations which were invited through a method which sought to minimise premature framing (Fielding & Thomas, 2008; Flick, 2009; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) through story elicitation reflect the proposed construction of medial managers. The findings therefore not only support the assumptions upon which the medial manager construct is based – in particular the tension and dissensus between organisational and staff or operational interests and concerns – but support the value of the research conceptualisation for being able to interpret different forms of response to such tensions. As discussed in chapter 8 and particularly section 8.4.1 the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity enables different manager actions and behaviours to be explained in terms of different but explicable responses to tensions and competing demands inherent in the medial manager position. Furthermore, within a single organisation, seven distinctive interpretations of the medial manager position are identified, and there is no clear correlation with organisational grade: the eleven team leaders are represented in six of the seven interpretations and the eight service managers represented in five. The findings further support the importance of attending to the individual identity work of medial managers and the ways in which medial managers construct an organisational role as well as being constructed by role expectations (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Mantere, 2008; McGivern, et al., 2015; Simpson & Carroll, 2008).

Second, the findings have enabled the development of an original and integrative model of medial manager identity work (section 8.2.3). This represents the culmination of the reflexive abductive iteration between the empirical data and the interpretative frameworks of a narrative conceptualisation of identity and the conceptualisation of the medial manager and medial manager identity work. The model is not intended as a predictive tool, or as a universal explanation of medial manager identity. Its purpose is to *map out* the multiple processes of medial manager identity within a particular context, namely a UK housing association, in order to enable the interpretation of individual medial manager positionings in response to being 'in-between' organisational and staff or practice interests and being subject to multiple discursive positions. The model identifies three distinct phases of identity work: responses to discursive practices, the construction of a social world from selected discursive resources, and the positioning of the self within that social world. It further maps out the key factors (perceptions of organisation, staff/practice and self) which serve as points of interaction and refraction within the ongoing dynamic between self-identity and identity regulation, through identity work, in the context of the medial manager's organisational position 'in-between' organisational and staff and practice sources of identity regulation. In section 8.3 the interpretative value of the model is demonstrated by applying it to the seven interpretations of the medial manager position identified within Panorama manager texts.

The research therefore addresses the gaps within research into manager identity discussed in section 3.6. First, rather than focusing on the effects of specific regulatory sources or specific identity work processes it has investigated, identified and mapped the range of processes of identity work, and the interplay between different processes of identity work and different discursive resources in the particular context of the medial manager positioned 'in-between' organisational and staff and operational interests (*c.f.* Brown, 2015; Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In doing so it has sought to answer the call of Ashforth and colleagues (2008, p. 341) to investigate and explain the "undercurrents" which form the ocean wave rather than "pictures of the surface": the dynamic co-construction of identity rather than the accumulation of multiple categories (Essers & Benschop, 2009). By developing an integrative map of medial

manager processes of identity work it also answers Brown and Toyoki's (2013) call for research into identity work which is both context-specific and which might be more widely applicable. Second, the research has specifically addressed the particular dualities inherent in the medial manager position (*e.g.* Clarke, et al., 2009; Ericsson & Augustinsson, 2015; Sims, 2003; Watson, 2008) and the ways in which managers respond to and manage organisational tensions and competing identifications. The research has uncovered both a range of identifiable responses to such tensions, and the particular processes and factors through which managers construct individual responses to those tensions. The research therefore adds a new perspective to the limited number of studies into such processes (*c.f.* Clarke, et al., 2009; Koerner, 2014). Moreover, while a small number of studies have identified strategies by which organisational actors defer identity closure by flexing between different discourses (Ellis & Ybema, 2010; Iedema, et al., 2004) or by bracketing contradictory statements and discourses (Clarke, et al., 2009; El-Sawad, et al., 2004) the research findings, notwithstanding the limitations discussed in section 9.4 below, suggest ways in which managers may construct identities which position them in distinctive ways within multiple subject positions, and the tactics and resources with which they construct such positions. That is, although Panorama managers recognise multiple subject positions and multiple constituencies, they are found to be constructing (within the limitations of a single occasion of interview talk) complex and nuanced but relatively defined positions in response to such constituencies. Rather than defer identity closure, they construct personal workplace identities from and through which to manage and answer the claims of others on them.

**Conclusion of the research aim and objectives**

As demonstrated in the foregoing section, each research objective has been addressed and the research aim of investigating the processes of medial manager identity work has been achieved. The following section sets out the specific contributions of the research.

## 9.3 Contributions of the research

The research uses the experience of the manager 'in-between' as a case study for examining identity processes, and conversely uses identity as a particular lens to frame and interpret that manager experience. The major contribution of the research

is to develop an empirically grounded model of manager identity work based on the conceptualisation of the medial manager who is 'in-between' those whom they manage and those who they are themselves managed by. The model both characterises the "picture[ ] of the surface of the ocean wave" (Ashforth, et al., 2008, p. 341) of medial manager identity within a particular organisational context, and also maps out the key "undercurrents" of identity work processes (Ashforth, et al., 2008, p. 341) which form different responses to the medial manager position in the organisation. In doing so the research makes a number of contributions: to knowledge of identity, knowledge of management and research methodology. These contributions are elaborated below.

**Contribution 1 – The thesis develops an original and integrative model of medial manager identity work.**

The thesis has developed a conceptual model of identity work based on the detailed embedded cases of twenty one medial managers in a UK housing association. Rather than focusing on the effects of specific regulatory sources or specific identity work processes it has investigated, identified and mapped the range of processes of identity work, and the interplay between different processes of identity work and different discursive resources in the particular context of the medial manager positioned 'in-between' organisational and staff and operational interests. The model has been shown to have interpretative value by applying it to the studied medial managers and identifying the particular processes and factors at play when medial managers adopt different organisational positions in response to the multiple subject positions in which they operate. Although the model is presented as a social construction based on a specific case and context, and does not claim to represent a generalisable theory, it nevertheless provides a map, not previously established, for further research to further investigate such processes of identity work and their interplay in other contexts. The model also makes some specific contributions to knowledge of medial manager identity work.

***1.1 The central role of narrative in identity work is highlighted and clarified.*** The thesis has demonstrated the extensive range and depth of identity work accomplished through narrative and storytelling, by applying an in-depth structural narrative and paradigmatic analysis of medial manager stories, as told within the occasion of a

research interview, which has not previously been reported. In doing so it not only supports but extensively develops the preliminary work by Gregg (2006). Stories accomplish identity work through plot and role which construct the manager and other organisational actors in different ways. Stories construct the social world of the organisation in different ways which privilege certain functions and relationships, and also position the manager in particular ways in response to the constructed social world. As well as demonstrating how narrative analysis can be a powerful tool for investigating and analysing identity, the research has also demonstrated the central role that narrative and storytelling may have for the ways in which individuals construct and make sense of themselves and others.

***1.2 Three distinct and inter-dependent phases of identity work are identified.*** The complex interplay of identity work processes identified within the research have been conceptualised as three distinct but interrelated and inter-dependent phases of identity work. Within the occasion of an interview, medial managers undertook identity work through personal responses to discursive practices to which they were subject; through selectively constructing organisational social worlds across different dimensions; and through constructing personal positions within those organisational worlds through narrative plot and role. These three phases are inter-dependent but not causally related. The construction of a personal social world selects and foregrounds particular discursive practices to which managers may respond, and narrative self-identity, through plot and role, prompts and encourages particular responsive strategies. However, the ability of managers to respond in different ways to discursive resources also prescribes the discursive resources available for constructing social worlds and the possible individual positionings within a social landscape. Narrative plot and role informs the construction of a social landscape; but such social landscapes give meaning to narrative. The thesis therefore makes an important contribution by providing a more detailed and nuanced framework for identifying and analysing processes of narrative identity work.

***1.3 Key factors which mediate the identity work of medial managers are identified.*** The thesis has identified several key factors relating to perceptions of the organisation, perceptions of staff and practice, and perceptions of the self, which are all shown to be significant points of interaction and refraction for the identity work of medial managers at Panorama between self-identity and sources of identity

regulation. Key perceptions of the organisation include the relative strength, clarity and consistency of organisational discourse; the nature of the manager's relationship with their own line manager; and the perceived attractiveness of a managerial identification. Key perceptions of staff and practice include the nature and history of the relationship with the staff team, the extent of shared values and the perceived importance of maintaining good relationships with staff; the perceptions of staff demands upon them and the extent to which they are able or wish to fulfil those demands; and the attractiveness of alternative identities to a managerial one, including those of an expert practitioner and a staff representative. Perceptions of self include personal history and the nature of previous experience inside and outside the organisation; personal values and the extent to which they are congruent with perceptions of the organisation; and the need to differentiate and to construct an organisational position which has significance and is recognised as such. The thesis has demonstrated how these factors may afford or constrain the identity work of medial managers as part of the complex dynamic between self-identity and identity regulation, and how these factors can interpret how and why medial managers may construct different organisational positions in response to their position 'in-between'.

**Contribution 2 – The thesis develops understanding of management.**

By investigating the identity work of medial managers the thesis has also made a number of key contributions to understanding of management and the manager role.

***2.1 The concept of the medial manager is shown to be robust and reflective of manager experience.*** The thesis has developed a theoretically and empirically justified conceptualisation of management as the 'medial manager' who is 'in-between' those whom they manage and those to whom they are responsible. This conceptualisation of management explicitly focuses on the complex, dual and paradoxical nature of the manager role as being responsible both for operationalising executive strategy and implementing decisions in the interests of the organisation, and for the support and welfare of their staff and the effective delivery of operational practice; as being expected to secure staff engagement and commitment to organisational values, and maintain the personal loyalty, good will and social capital of those staff. The thesis proposes that the medial manager role can be interpreted as being based on two dimensions framing medial manager identity which are directly

implicated in the medial manager's position 'in-between'. First, there are multiple possible identifications available to a medial manager as a direct result of their organisational position 'in-between' and the multiple ways in which to 'be' and to act as a medial manager. Second, such multiple and possible identifications, and the contradictions inherent in the medial manager position, afford the medial manager some scope for agency in managing, sustaining or selecting between multiple and conflicting discourses and subject positions. The thesis has demonstrated that such a conceptualisation of management is reflected in the stories and talk of the medial managers. Medial managers recognised competing subject positions as managers in the service of the organisation, as members of their staff team or service area and as practitioners; and revealed various tactics for managing such competing subjectivities. Analysis of medial manager texts enabled the identification of seven distinct interpretations of the medial manager position based on based on identifying which subject position(s) appeared as of primary significance for the medial manager, and on the extent to which managers recognised competing organisational interests and the ways in which they responded to and managed such interests. Such positionings of medial managers were also found to reflect the identity work and positioning accomplished through the stories told by medial managers.

***2.2 Tensions between different interests commonly attributed to the middle manager role are shown to also be part of the daily experience of managers at other levels, and perhaps especially at team leader level.*** Whereas much literature has focused on the function of the 'middle manager' as being particularly subject to competing claims and interests, the empirical evidence from the research finds managers recognising such tensions across all hierarchical levels. Team leaders in particular were also shown to be engaging in daily acts of "translating" executive strategy into operational realities (Currie & Proctor, 2005) and of being conscious of their position as the immediate face of the organisation to staff. The thesis therefore highlights the need for further research into the organisational role of first-level managers, and the significance of such manager responses to their position 'in-between'.

***2.3 The precarious nature of manager identity is highlighted, and the potential attraction of other organisational subject positions is revealed.*** Through the conceptualisation of the medial manager the thesis has not only drawn attention to

the multiple demands and subject positions impinging on managers, and the extensive range of identity work undertaken in order to manage such multiplicities, but also demonstrated that managing or resolving such competing demands is not obvious or straightforward. The organisational position of the medial manager 'in-between' offers various possible alternative identities to a managerial one, or resources with which to construct personal versions of a managerial identity, including occupation and expertise, being responsible for the welfare of staff or through shared group identity with staff. In particular the role of practice is highlighted as a particularly significant as a resource for identity work for Panorama managers. Being a manager in the service is the organisation is not the only possible identity available to managers, nor is it necessarily the easiest or most attractive one to construct and maintain. Additionally the research has revealed the importance for many managers of constructing workplace identities which have personal meaning and which establish a differentiated or unique organisational position. Whereas much research focuses on the precarious nature of manager identity in terms of the ability of the manager to construct and maintain an identity – that is, adopting a managerialist paradigm in which the manager is obliged to construct the right kind of identity – the research offers an alternative perspective, of managers constructing personally workable identities with the available resources, and highlights instead the limitations of the manager role or position as an effective resource for constructing a workable workplace identity.

**Contribution 3 – The thesis makes a methodological contribution**

***3.1 The developed method of eliciting stories and applying narrative and paradigmatic analysis is shown to offer rich insights into both the self-identities and identity work of medial managers.*** The thesis has extensively developed the method of narrative and paradigmatic analysis demonstrated by Gregg (2006) by actively eliciting stories from managers as acts of self-presentation, by incorporating analysis of roles as well as narrative functions, and by categorising forms of paradigmatic organisational construction, in addition to contextualising such analysis within an understanding of narrative identity work. The method has been demonstrated to be capable of revealing rich and granular detail about the workplace identities and processes of identity work accomplished by medial managers. By drawing on the simple and recognisable social construction of stories the method

enables managers to say something important about themselves (Humphreys & Brown, 2002) and for the listener to gain insight into the concrete and particular which underpins the more abstract and universal (van Manen, 1997). Moreover, by reading and analysing such stories as classic folk-tales using the narrative and role categories developed by Propp (1968) the method also enables the 'creative rupturing' (Sanger, 1996) of participant discourse by the researcher, which is necessary to achieve new understandings.

## 9.4 Reflections on the research and future directions

The research has revealed some specific answers to the question of how medial managers accomplish identity work in the context of the organisational tensions they operate between, and the kinds of workplace identities that they construct. A number of key contributions to knowledge have been identified in section 9.3.

The research strategy of a single unit embedded case study (Yin, 2003), the method of story elicitation and the analytical strategy of successive processes of structural and thematic analysis have revealed rich and detailed insights into the identity work of medial managers within the particular context of a housing association, Panorama Housing. In particular, the method of story elicitation was highly effective in collecting personal accounts of the ways in which managers understood their organisational role, the way in which they privileged particular functions, their relationships with other organisational actors, and the personal meanings which they ascribed to their role. Although several managers expressed worries that they were poor at telling stories or "hadn't really got one" they nevertheless all told recognisable stories in spite of their own self-assessments. The process of detailed structural analysis of twenty one medial manager interview texts and the successive processes of thematic analysis was highly labour-intensive and time consuming, but has produced a detailed picture of multiple identity processes and their interplay, which has not previously been mapped.

Section 4.3.3 suggested that tests of validity should primarily be those of coherence and pragmatic use (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Coherence has been demonstrated in several ways: through triangulation between the pre-conceived theoretical perspective of the medial manager and narrative identity, and the empirical data (Stake, 1995) collected through elicited stories and medial manager interview talk;

and through the gathering of "detailed descriptions that exact fullness and completeness of detail" (van Manen, 1997, p. 17) from elicited stories in which medial managers were free to present and represent themselves in ways that reflected their personal understandings of their organisational position and experience, and which are recognisable as common human experience (Bold, 2012) in the form of familiar stories. Nevertheless, it remains the case that the research represents a personal 'storytelling' of Panorama, its managers and their stories by the researcher (Beech & Sims, 2007; Corbett-Etchevers & Mounoud, 2011; Watson, 1995), albeit a reflexively informed one. The test of pragmatic use has been met through the demonstration of the practical value of the research, for increasing theoretical understanding of identity and interpreting the experience of managers.

A number of limitations of the research have already been recognised (section 4.5.1 and section 4.7). The purpose of the research is not to produce generalisable results or grand explanatory theory, but to deepen understanding of the phenomenon of medial manager identity work through its investigation in a particular context, and to expand the available repertoire of social constructions through which the phenomenon may be interpreted and approached (Donmoyer, 2000). The research developed an initial social construction of the medial manager, and this has been found to have some validity through correspondence with stories elicited from medial managers. The research has further developed an integrative and original model which maps the key factors and processes of identity work of medial managers in their organisational context, and which provides some interpretation and explanation as to how and why medial managers construct different workplace identities in response to their organisational position 'in-between'. Nevertheless, this social construction reflects the very specific context of a UK housing association, and is developed from a method which focused on identity processes revealed through medial manager talk, rather than social interaction and dramaturgy, and within a particular and single point in time. The stories told by Panorama managers were told to a particular audience (i.e. the researcher), and as anticipated, and despite the deliberate effort not to prematurely frame interview conversation in providing pre-interview information, a small number of managers made direct reference to trying to offer material that they thought would be helpful to a researcher. The excerpt from the interview transcript of Varley, presented in appendix 1C is the most

explicit example, and the transcript reveals some of the ways in which the researcher sought to re-focus the interview on the personal meanings of the manager's choice. As also evidenced in the transcript excerpt, the researcher is fully involved and implicated in the interview conversation and the knowledge that is constructed through the interview conversation is properly recognised as a co-construction between researcher and participant (Blumer, 1969; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; van Manen, 1997). Similarly, the analytical process and in particular the use of Propp (1968) and Levi-Strauss (1963, 1983) and the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity, while revealing rich insights, necessarily precludes other possible readings and interpretations. Nevertheless, whilst these limitations are fully recognised the researcher has sought, through personal reflexivity and transparency of the methods of data collection and analysis, to present the 'craftsmanship' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) of the research process in order for the reader to make their own assessment of its validity and reliability. The researcher's own assessment is that the findings are sufficiently grounded in robust methods, researcher reflexivity and rich empirical data to be considered substantive and valid.

The particular limitations of the research methodology may form the initial basis for further research in order to further explore, test and refine the integrative model of medial manager identity. First, the research methods and developed interpretative models could be applied to different organisational contexts to establish whether the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity and the processes of identity work revealed in the Panorama context remain valid, and to further develop and refine the integrative model of medial manager identity work. Second, the research conceptualisation and integrative model could be applied to medial manager social interaction and observed behaviours, rather than, or in addition to interviews in order to further explore and assess its validity. In particular, research might deliberately focus on the ways and extent to which medial manager 'identity-as-talk', as characterised by the research conceptualisation of medial manager identity, is consistent with their 'identity-as-performance' in their social interactions with others, and in different contexts, in order to further explore the role of self-identity in identity work, and the role of personal meaning and interpretation of their organisational role. Third, the research conceptualisation and integrative model of medial manager identity could be applied to longitudinal studies to investigate

processes of identity work over time and across different contexts. In particular, and drawing on the insights into the experience and challenges of 'becoming' a manager, future research might very usefully focus on following new managers, or newly promoted managers, in order to further explore their developing experience and understanding of manager position over time.

As well as further assessing the validity of the interpretative models of medial manager identity developed by this research, future research might also address some specific issues raised by the thesis. First, the research suggests that medial managers may be able to construct relatively coherent and perhaps consistent positions in response to their organisational position 'in-between'. This is in contrast to other studies which have highlighted the ways in which managers defer identity closure and continue to flex between or bracket alternative or contradictory positions (e.g. Clarke, et al., 2009; El-Sawad, et al., 2004; Iedema, et al., 2004). The research findings may be a product of the particular methods which were time-specific, or the particular organisational context; or they may reveal that managers do not always sustain (or attempt to sustain) the demanding identity work of deferring closure, but may construct distinctive personal workplace identities from and through which to manage and answer the claims of others on them. Longitudinal and dramaturgical studies in particular may be able to clarify the extent to which managers sustain the paradoxical nature of their organisational position or seek to resolve the paradox. Second, the research has highlighted the particular role that occupational experience and expertise played in the identity work of medial managers in Panorama Housing. Further research could investigate whether this is a particular feature of the context of social housing or a (semi-)public sector, or whether this is indeed an under-researched factor in manager identity work. Thirdly, the research has identified little difference between hierarchical levels of managers in terms of organisational positioning or processes of identity work. Future research could explore the extent to which this is reflected in other organisational contexts and whether there are in fact significant differences not yet identified.

## 9.5 Concluding remarks

The thesis set out to investigate the processes of identity work of medial managers in the context of their organisational position 'in-between' multiple and competing

organisational subject positions, interests and expectations. The research has been conducted on a reflexively abductive basis, with theoretical constructs being developed from the extant literature and used to reflexively and iteratively frame and interpret empirical data and its analysis. The research has revealed the identity work of medial managers to be rich, complex and affected by multiple factors, but that it is indeed significantly framed by the medial manager's position 'in-between' the organisation and the staff and services they manage, and their sometimes competing responsibilities towards each.

The research makes a number of contributions to knowledge. Its substantial contribution is to develop an empirically grounded model of manager identity work based on the conceptualisation of the medial manager who is 'in-between' those whom they manage and those who they are themselves managed by, and which both characterises different medial manager positions and reveals the processes of identity work which underpin such positionings. It adds to knowledge of identity and identity work by revealing the ways in which identity work is accomplished through narrative, by identifying three distinct but interrelated phases of identity work and by identifying key mediating factors which may afford or constrain the ongoing dynamic of identity work between self-identity and identity regulation. It adds to knowledge of managers by confirming the conceptualisation of the medial manager, by demonstrating that such positioning and the organisational tensions that it represents may be recognised by managers at all hierarchical levels, not just classical 'middle managers', and by revealing the precarious nature of managerial identity and the potential attractiveness of other workplace identities. It offers a methodological contribution by demonstrating a way of gaining rich, detailed and granular insights into manager experience, the individual and personal workplace identities that managers construct, and the processes of identity work through which they construct, maintain and repair such identities.

Being based on a single unit embedded case study of medial managers in a UK housing association, and conducted within a social constructivist paradigm, the research does not seek to demonstrate findings which are generalisable or which constitute a universal explanatory theory. However, it has succeeded in its aim of investigating the phenomenon of medial manager identity work in detail in the context of a specific case. By presenting an enriched picture of the particular

experiences of medial managers in Panorama Housing, and by openly and reflexively presenting the particular perspectives and cognitive structures of the researcher, it has expanded the repertoire of social constructions of management and manager identity work available to scholars and practitioners of management, opened up new heuristic possibilities and formed new and significant questions through which to continue to further knowledge.

# References


Abbott, A. (1988). *The System of Professionals: An essay on the division of expert labor*. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press.

Ainsworth, S., & Grant, D. (2012). Revitalising scholarship in identity studies. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(4), 60-62.

Ainsworth, S., Grant, D., & Iedema, R. (2009). "Keeping things moving": space and the construction of middle management identity in a post-NPA organisation. *Discourse & Communication, 3*(1), 5-25.

Alexiadou, N. (2001). Management identities in transition: a case study from further education. *The Sociological Review, 49*(3), 412-435.

Alimo-Metcalfe, B., & Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2005). Leadership: time for a new direction? *Leadership, 1*(1), 51-71.

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond neopositivists, romantics and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organisational research. *Academy of Management Journal, 28*(1), 13-33.

Alvesson, M., Ashcraft, K. L., & Thomas, R. (2008). Identity matters: Reflections on the construction of identity scholarship in organization studies. *Organization, 15*(1), 5-28.

Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: On the study of organisations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations, 53*(9), 1125-1149.

Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problematization. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(2), 247-271.

Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive Methodology* (2nd ed.). London, UK: SAGE.

Alvesson, M., & Sveningsson, S. (2003a). Good visions, bad micro-management and ugly ambiguity: Contradictions of (non-) leadership in a knowledge-intensive organisation. *Organization Studies, 24*(6), 961-988.

Alvesson, M., & Sveningsson, S. (2003b). The great disappearing act: difficulties in doing 'leadership'. *The Leadership Quarterly, 14*(3), 359-381.

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organisational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies, 39*(5), 619-644.

Andersson, T. (2010). Struggles of managerial being and becoming. *Journal of Management Development, 29*(2), 167-176.

Ashcraft, K. L. (2013). The glass slipper: "Incorporating" occupational identity in management studies. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*(1), 6-31.

Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organisations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management 34*(3), 325-374.

Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organisation. *Academy of Management Review, 14*(1), 20-39.

Ashforth, B. E., Rogers, K. M., & Corley, K. G. (2011). Identity in organizations: exploring cross-level dynamics. *Organization Science, 22*(5), 1144-1156.

Austin, M. J., Regan, K., Gothard, S., & Carnochan, S. (2013). Becoming a manager in nonprofit human service organisations: Making the transition from specialist to generalist. *Administration in Social Work, 37*, 372-385.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1935/1981/1994). Discourse in the novel (M. Holquist & C. Emerson, Trans.). In P. Morris (Ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Vološinov* (pp. 73-80). New York, NY: Oxford Universty Press.

Baldry, C., & Hallier, J. (2007). *Who am I? Work space and social identity*. Paper presented at the 25th Annual Labour Process Conference, The University of Amsterdam, Holland.

Balogun, J., & Johnson, G. (2004). Organizational restructuring and middle manager sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal, 47*(4), 523-549.

Becker, H. S. (2000). Cases, causes, conjectures, stories and imagery. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley & P. Foster (Eds.), *Case Study Method* (pp. 223-233). London, UK: SAGE.

Beech, N. (2008). On the nature of dialogic identity work. *Organization, 15*(1), 51-74.

Beech, N., & Johnson, P. (2005). Discourses of disrupted identities in the practice of strategic shange: the mayor, the street-fighter and the insider-out. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 18*(1), 31-47.

Beech, N., & Sims, D. (2007). Narrative methods for identity research. In A. Pullen, N. Beech & D. Sims (Eds.), *Exploring Identity: Concepts and methods* (pp. 288-301). Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Bell, E., & Bryman, A. (2007). The ethics of management research: an exploratoty content analysis. *British Journal of Management, 18*(1), 63-77.

Belova, O. (2010). Polyphony and the sense of self in flexible organisations. *Scandanavian Journal of Management, 26*(1), 67-76.

Bentz, V. M., & Shapiro, J. J. (1998). *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research*. Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE.

Berg, B. L. (2001). *Qualitative Research Methods for Social Sciences* (4th ed.). London, UK: Allyn and Bacon.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. London, UK: Penguin.

Besharov, M. L., & Smith, W. K. (2014). Multiple institutional logics in organizations: explaining their varied nature and implications. *Academy of Management Review, 39*(3), 364-381.

Billig, M. (2001). Discursive, rhetorical and ideological messages. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (pp. 210-221). London, UK: SAGE.

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Boje, D. M. (1991). The storytelling organisation: A study of story performance in an office-supply firm. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 36*, 106-126.

Boje, D. M. (1995). Stories of the storytelling organisation: A postmodern analysis of Disney as "Tamara-land". *Academy of Management Journal, 38*(4), 997-1035.

Boje, D. M. (2001). *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London, UK: Sage.

Bold, C. (2012). *Using Narrative in Research*. London, UK: SAGE.

Bolton, S. C. (2005). 'Making up' managers: the case of NHS nurses. *Work, Employment and Society, 19*(1), 5-23.

Bradley, Q. (2008). Capturing the castle: tenant governance in social housing companies. *Housing Studies, 23*(6), 879-897.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*(5), 475-482.

Brewer, M. B. (2003). Optimal distintiveness, social identity and the self. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Brown, A. D. (2001). Organization studies and identity: Towards a research agenda. *Human Relations, 54*(1), 113-121.

Brown, A. D. (2006). A narrative approach to collective identities. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(4), 731-753.

Brown, A. D. (2015). Identities and identity work in organizations. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 17*, 20-40.

Brown, A. D., Colville, I., & Pye, A. (2014). Making sense of sensemaking in organisations. *Organization Studies, December 3*, 1-14.

Brown, A. D., Gabriel, Y., & Gherardi, S. (2009). Storytelling and change: An unfolding story. *Organization, 16*(3), 323-333.

Brown, A. D., & Humphreys, M. (2006). Organizational identity and place: A discursive exploration of hegemony and resistance. *Journal of Management Studies, 43*(2), 231-257.

Brown, A. D., Humphreys, M., & Gurney, P. M. (2005). Narrative, identity and change: a case study of Laskarina Holidays. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 18*(4), 312-326.

Brown, A. D., & Lewis, M. A. (2011). Identities, Discipline and Routines. *Organization Studies, 32*(7), 871-895.

Brown, A. D., Stacey, P., & Nandhakumar, J. (2008). Making sense of sensemaking narratives. *Human Relations, 61*(8), 1035-1062.

Brown, A. D., & Toyoki, S. (2013). Identity work and legitimacy. *Organization Studies, 34*(7), 875-896.

Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*(1), 1-21.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Burgess, N., & Currie, G. (2013). The knowledge brokering role of the hybrid middle manager: the case of healthcare. *British Journal of Management, 24*(SI September 2013), 132-142.

Burgess, R. (1984). *In the Field: An introduction to field research*. London, UK: George Allen & Unwin.

Burke, P. J. (2006). Identity Change. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 69*(1), 81-96.

Carroll, B., & Levy, L. (2008). Defaulting to management: leadership defined by what it is not. *Organization, 15*(1), 75-96.

Carter, B., Danford, A., Howcroft, D., Richardson, H., Smith, A., & Taylor, P. (2014). 'They can't be the buffer any longer': Front-line managers and class relations under white collar lean production. *Capital and Class, 38*(2), 323-343.

Cascon-Pereira, & Hallier, J. (2012). Getting that certain feeling: The role and emotions in the meaning, construction and enactment of doctor managers' identities. *British Journal of Management, 23*(1), 130-144.

Casey, C. (1995). *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialisation*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Casey, R. (2008). On becoming a social housing manager: work identities in an 'invisible' occupation. *Housing Studies, 23*(5), 761-780.

Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (pp. 249-291). Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE.

Clarke, C. A., Brown, A. D., & Hope Hailey, V. (2009). Working identities? Antagonistic discursive resources and managerial identity. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 323-352.

Clegg, S., Courpasson, D., & Phillips, N. (2006). *Power and Organisations*. London, UK: SAGE.

Clegg, S., Kornberger, M., & Pitsis, T. (2011). *Managing and Organisations* (3rd ed.). London, UK: SAGE.

Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Clifton, J. (2014). Small stories, positioning and the discursive construction of leader identity in business meetings. *Leadership, 10*(1), 99-117.

Clough, P. (2002). *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.

Cohler, B. J., & Hammack, P. L. (2006). Making a gay identity: Life story and the construction of a coherent self. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A.

Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 151-172). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Collier, P. M. (2005). Governance and the quasi-public organisation: a case study of social housing. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting, 16*(7), 929-949.

Collinson, D. (1994). Strategies of resistance: Power, knowledge and subjectivity in the workplace. In J. Jermier, D. Knights & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Resistance and Power in Organisations: Agency, Subjectivity and the Labour Process* (pp. 25-68). London, UK: Routledge.

Collinson, D. (2003). Identities and insecurities: Selves at work. *Organization, 10*(3), 527-547.

Collinson, D. (2005). Dialectics of leadership. *Human Relations, 58*(11), 1419-1442.

Collinson, D. (2006). Rethinking followership: A post-structuralist analysis of follower identities. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17*(2), 179-189.

Cooper, G. (2008). Conceptualising social life. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed., pp. 5-20). London, UK: SAGE.

Corbett-Etchevers, I., & Mounoud, E. (2011). A narrative framework for management ideas: Disclosing the plots of knowledge management in a multi-national company. *Management Learning, 42*(2), 165-181.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE.

Corley, K. G. (2004). Defined by our strategy or our culture? Hierarchical differences in perceptions of organisational identity and change. *Human Relations, 57*(9), 1145-1177.

Costas, J., & Fleming, P. (2009). Beyond dis-identitication: A discursive approach to self-alienation in contemporary organisations. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 353-378.

Coupland, C., Blyton, P., & Bacon, N. (2005). A longitudinal study of the influence of shop floor work teams on expressions of 'us' and 'them'. *Human Relations, 58*(8), 1055-1081.

Coupland, C., & Brown, A. D. (2012). Identities in action: Processes and outcomes. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(4), 1-4.

Coupland, C., Brown, A. D., Daniels, K., & Humphreys, M. (2008). Saying it with feeling: Analysing speakable emotions. *Human Relations, 61*(3), 327-353.

Creary, S. J., Caza, B. B., & Roberts, L. M. (2015). Out of the box? How managing a subordinate's multiple identities affects the quality of a manager-subordinate relationship. *Academy of Management Review, 40*(4), 538-562.

Croft, C., Currie, G., & Lockett, A. (2015). The impact of emotionally important social identities on the construction of a managerial leader identity: A challenge for nurses in the English National Health Service. *Organization Studies, 36*(1), 113-131.

Cunliffe, A. L., & Coupland, C. (2012). From hero to villain to hero: Making experience sensible through embodied narrative sensemaking. *Human Relations, 65*(1), 63-88.

Cunliffe, A. L., Luhman, J. T., & Boje, D. M. (2004). Narrative temporality: Implications for organisational research. *Organization Studies, 25*(2), 261-286.

Currie, G., & Brown, A. D. (2003). A narratological approach to understanding processes of organising in a UK hospital. *Human Relations, 56*(5), 563-586.

Currie, G., & Proctor, S. J. (2005). The antecedents of middle managers' strategic contribution: The case of a professional bureaucracy. *Journal of Management Studies, 42*(7), 1325-1356.

Czarniawska, B. (2004a). *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London, UK: Sage.

Dailey, S. L., & Browning, L. (2014). Retelling stories in organizations: Understanding the functions of narrative repetition. *Academy of Management Review, 39*(1), 22-43.

Data Protection Act. (1998) Retrieved 17 June, 2013, from http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents

Davies, B., & Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*(43-65).

Davies, B., & Harre, R. (2001). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A reader* (pp. 261-271). London, UK: SAGE.

De Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

DeChurch, L. A., Hiller, N. J., Murase, T., Doty, D., & Salas, E. (2010). Leadership across levels: Levels of leaders and their levels of impact. *The Leadership Quarterly, 21*(6), 1069-1085.

Delmestri, G. (2006). Streams of inconsistent institutional identities: Middle managers as carriers of multiple identities. *Human Relations*, *59*(11), 1515-1541.

Denissen, A. M. (2010). The right tools for the job: Constructing gender meanings and identities in the male-dominated construction industry. *Human Relations*, *63*(7), 1051-1069.

Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive Biography*. London, UK: SAGE.

Dick, P. (2004). Discourse analysis. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research*. London, UK: SAGE.

Donmoyer, R. (2000). Generalisability and the single case study. In R. Gomm, M. Hammersley & P. Foster (Eds.), *Case Study Method* (pp. 45-68). London, UK: SAGE.

Doos, M., Johansson, P., & Wilhelmson, L. (2015). Beyond being present: learning-oriented leadership in the daily work of middle managers. *Journal of Workplace Learning, 27*(6), 408-425.

Down, S., & Reveley, J. (2009). Between narration and interaction: Situating first-line supervisor identity work. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 379-401.

Du Gay, P. (1996a). *Consumption and Identity at Work*. London, UK: SAGE.

Du Gay, P. (1996b). Organizing identity: Entrepreneurial governance and public management. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 151-169). London, UK: SAGE.

Dundes, A. (1968). Introduction to the Second Edition. In V. Propp (Ed.), *Morphology of the Folktale* (2nd ed., pp. i-xviii). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Dutton, J. E., Roberts, L. M., & Bednar, J. (2010). Pathways for positive identity construction at work: Four types of positive identity and the building of social resources. *Academy of Management Review, 35*(2), 265-293.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., & Jackson, P. R. (2008). *Management Research* (3rd ed.). London, UK: SAGE.

Edwards, R., & Mauthner, M. (2002). Ethics and feminist research: theory and practice. In M. Mauthner, M. Birch, J. Jessop & T. Mills (Eds.), *Ethics in Qualitative Research* (pp. 14-31). London, UK: SAGE.

El-Sawad, A., Arnold, J., & Cohen, L. (2004). 'Doublethink': The prevalence and function of contradiction in accounts of organisational life. *Human Relations, 57*(9), 1179-1203.

Ellemers, N., & Rink, F. (2005). Identity in work groups: The beneficial and detrimental consequences of multiple identities and group norms for collaboration and group performance. *Advances in Group Processes, 22*, 1-41.

Ellis, N., & Ybema, S. (2010). Marketing identities: Shifting circles of identification in inter-organizational relationships. *Organization Studies, 31*(3), 279-305.

Elsbach, K. D., & Bhattacharya, C. B. (2001). Defining who you are by what you're not: Organizational disidentification and the National Rifle Association. *Organization Science, 12*(4), 393-413.

Ericsson, U., & Augustinsson, S. (2015). The role of first line managers in a healthcare organisation - a qualitative study on the work life experience of ward managers. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 0*(0), 1-16.

Essers, C., & Benschop, Y. (2009). Muslim business women doing boundary work: The negotiation of Islam, gender and ethnicity within entrepreneurial contexts. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 403-423.

Eveline, J. (2005). Gendering feminised and masculinised identities. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 18*(6), 641-658.

Fauconnier, G., & Turner, M. (2008). Rethinking metaphor. In R. W. Gibbs (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (pp. 53-66). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Fielding, N., & Thomas, H. (2008). Qualitative interviewing. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life* (3rd ed., pp. 245-265). London, UK: SGAE.

Fiol, C. M., Pratt, M. G., & O'Connor, E. J. (2009). Managing intractable identity conflicts. *Academy of Management Review, 34*(1), 32-55.

Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs, 51*, 1-22.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and distance. *Organization, 10*(1), 157-179.

Flick, U. (2009). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (4th ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Floyd, S. W., & Wooldridge, B. (1992). Middle management involvement in strategy and its association with strategic type: A research note. *Strategic Management Journal, 13*(S1), 153-167.

Ford, J. (2006). Discourses of leadership: Gender, identity and contradiction in a UK public sector organisation. *Leadership, 2*(1), 77-99.

Ford, J. (2010). Studying leadership critically: A psychosocial lens on leadership identities. *Leadership, 6*(1), 47-65.

Foster, K. (2012). Work, narrative identity and social affiliation. *Work, Employment and Society, 26*(2), 935-950.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In L. H. Martin, H. Gutman & P. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16-49). London, UK: Tavistock.

Frost, P., & Robinson, S. (1999). The toxic handler: Organisational hero - and casualty. *Harvard Business Review, 77*(4), 96-106.

Gabel, S. (2002). Leading from the middle: surviving the sqeeze of apparently irreconcilable forces. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 23*(7), 361-371.

Gabriel, Y. (1999). Beyond happy families: A critical reevaluation of the control-resistance-identity triangle. *Human Relations, 52*(2), 179-203.

Gabriel, Y. (2004). *Myths, Stories and Organisations: Premodern narratives for our time*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Gabriel, Y., & Griffiths, D. S. (2004). Stories in organisational research. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research* (pp. 114-126). London, UK: SAGE.

Garcia, P., & Hardy, C. (2007). Positioning, similarity and difference: Narratives of individual and organizational identities in an Australian university. *Scandanavian Journal of Management, 23*, 363-383.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gergen, K. J. (1992). Towards a post-modern psychology. In S. Kvale (Ed.), *Psychology and post-modernism* (pp. 17-30). London, UK: SAGE.

Gergen, K. J. (2000). *The Saturated Self*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Gergen, K. J. (2001). Self-Narration in social life. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A reader* (pp. 247-260). London, UK: Sage.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Gill, J., & Johnson, P. (2002). *Research Methods for Managers*. London, UK: SAGE.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Gleeson, D., & Knights, D. (2008). Reluctant leaders: An analysis of middle managers' perceptions of leadership in Further Education in England. *Leadership, 4*(1), 49-72.

Gleeson, D., & Shain, F. (2003). Managing ambiguity in further education. In N. Bennett, M. Crawford & M. Cartwright (Eds.), *Effective Educational Leadership* (pp. 229-246). London, UK: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Gleick, J. (1987). *Chaos*. London, UK: Cardinal.

Glucksberg, S. (2008). How metaphors create categories - quickly. In R. W. Gibbs (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (pp. 67-83). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Goffman, E. (1961). *Encounters: Two studies in the sociology of interaction*. Indianapolis, IA: Bobbs-Merrill.

Goosseff, K. A. (2010). Autopoeisis and maning: a biological approach to Bakhtin's superaddressee. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 23*(2), 145-151.

Grant, A. M., Berg, J. M., & Cable, D. M. (2014). Job titles as identity badges: How self-reflective job titles can reduce emotional anxiety. *Academy of Management Journal, 57*(4), 1201-1225.

Gregg, G. S. (2006). The raw and the bland: A structural model of narrative identity. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 63-87). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Gruis, V., & Nieboer, N. (2004a). Market orientation in social housing management. *Property Management, 22*(3), 186-188.

Gruis, V., & Nieboer, N. (2004b). Strategic housing management: an asset management model for social landlords. *Property Management, 22*(3), 201-213.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2001). At the border of narrative and ethnography. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The American Tradition in Qualitative Research* (Vol. II, pp. 324-332). London, UK: SAGE.

Hales, C. (2002). Bureaucracy-lite and continuities in managerial work. *British Journal of Management, 13*(1), 51-66.

Hales, C. (2005). Rooted in supervision, branching into management: Continuity and change in the role of first-line manager. *Journal of Management Studies, 42*(3), 471-506.

Halford, S., & Leonard, P. (2006). Place, space and time: Contextualising workplace subjectivities. *Organization Studies, 27*(5), 657-676.

Hall, S. (1996). Who needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1-17). London, UK: SAGE.

Hallam, E., Hockey, J., & Howarth, G. (1999). *Beyond the Body: Death and social identity*. London, UK: Routledge.

Hallier, J. (2004). Embellishing the past: middle manager identity and informality in the implementation of new technology. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 19*(1), 43-62.

Harding, N., Lee, H., & Ford, J. (2014). Who is the 'middle manager'? *Human Relations, 67*(12), 1213-1237.

Haslam, S. A. (2004). *Psychology in Organisations: The Social Identity Approach* (2nd ed.). London, UK: SAGE.

Haslam, S. A., & Reicher, S. (2006). Social identity and the dynamics of organizional life: insights from the BBC Prison Study. In C. A. Bartel, S. L. Blader & A. Wrzesniewski (Eds.), *Identity and the Modern Organization* (pp. 135-166). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hassard, J., McCann, L., & Morris, J. (2009). *Managing in the Modern Corporation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hatch, M. J., & Schultz, M. (2002). The dynamics of organisational identity. *Human Relations, 55*(8), 989-1018.

Hawkins, M. A., & Saleem, F. Z. (2012). The omnipresent personal narrative: story formulation and the interplay among narratives. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 25*(2), 204-219.

Helms Mills, J., Thurlow, A., & Mills, A. J. (2010). Making sense of sensemaking: the critical sensemaking approach. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, 5*(2), 182-195.

Henderson, A., Burmeister, L., Schoonbeck, S., Ossenberg, C., & Gneilding, J. (2014). Impact on engaging middle management in practice interventions on staff support and learning culture: a quasi-experimental design. *Journal of Nursing Management, 22*, 995-1004.

Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the human condition*. London, UK: SAGE.

Herzig, S. E., & Jimmieson, N. L. (2006). Middle managers' uncertainty management during organisational change. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 27*(8), 628-645.

Hitchin, L., & Maksymiu, W. (2012). Story spaces: a methodological contribution. *New Technology, Work and Employment, 27*(1), 65-77.

Hogg, M. A. (2001). A social theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5*(3), 184-200.

Hogg, M. A. (2003). Social Identity. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 462-479). New York: The Guilford Press.

Holden, L., & Roberts, I. (2004). The depowerment of European middle managers: Challenges and uncertainties. *Journal of Managerial Psychology, 19*(3), 269-287.

Hollander, E. P. (1974). Processes of leadership emergence. *Journal of Contemporary Business, 3*(4), 19-33.

Hollway, W. (2001). Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A reader* (pp. 272-283). London, UK: Sage.

Hollway, W., & Jefferson, T. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free association, narrative and the interview method*. London, UK: SAGE.

Holquist, M. (1981). *MM Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination* Austin, TX: University of Austin, Texas.

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. (1997). Active interviewing. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice* (pp. 113-129). London, UK: Sage.

Hopkinson, G. C. (2003). Stories from the front-line: How they construct the organisation. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*(8), 1943-1969.

Horsfall, C. (2001). Team leaders make a difference in raising achievement. In C. Horsfall (Ed.), *Leadership issues: Raising achievement* (pp. 33-40). London, UK: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Horton, K. E., Bayerl, P. S., & Jacobs, G. (2014). Identity conflicts at work: An integrative framework. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 35,* S6-S22.

Housing Corporation. (2006). *Delivering change through involvement*. London, UK: Housing Corporation.

Humphreys, M., & Brown, A. D. (2002). Narratives of organisational identity and identification: A case study of hegemony and resistance. *Organization Studies, 23*(3), 421-447.

Hutchinson, F. J., & Ward, C. (2012). Corporate governance and social housing - adopting a market model? *Journal of Finance and Management in Public Services, 10*(2), 14-25.

Huusko, L. (2006). What is expected from supervisors? One more factor to explain the problems in teamwork. *Team Performance Management, 12*(3), 91-101.

Huy, Q. N. (2002). Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: The contribution of middle managers. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 47*(1), 31-69.

Ibarra, H., & Barbulescu, R. (2010). Identity as narrative: Prevalence, effectiveness and consequences of narrative identity work in macro work transitions. *Academy of Management Review, 35*(1), 135-154.

Iedema, R., Degeling, P., Braithwaite, J., & White, L. (2004). 'It's an interesting conversation I'm hearing': the doctor as manager. *Organization Studies, 25*(1), 15-33.

Iszatt-White, M. (2009). Leadership as emotional labour: The effortful accomplishment of valuing practices. *Leadership, 5*(4), 447-467.

Jaros, S. (2009). *Identity and the workplace: An assessment of contextualist and discursive approaches*. Paper presented at the Labour Process Conference, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.

Jenkins, R. (2008). *Social Identity* (3rd ed.). Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Jones, K., & Kaluarachchi, Y. (2007). Operational factors affecting strategic partnering in UK social housing. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management, 14*(4), 334-345.

Jones, R., & Kriflik, G. (2006). Subordinate expectations of leadership within a cleaned-up bureaucracy: A grounded theory study. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 19*(2), 154-172.

Karreman, D., & Alvesson, M. (2001). Making newsmakers: Conversational identity at work. *Organization Studies, 22*(1), 59-89.

Kelley, R. E. (1988). In praise of followers. *Harvard Business Review, 66*(6), 142-148.

Kelly, S. (2008). Leadership: A categorical mistake? *Human Relations, 61*(6), 763-782.

Kenny, K., Whittle, A., & Willmott, H. (2011). *Understanding Identity and Organizations*. London, UK: SAGE.

Kilroy, J., & Dundon, T. (2015). The multiple faces of front line managers. *Employee Relations, 37*(4), 410-427.

King, N. (2004). Using interviews in qualitative research. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research* (pp. 11-22). London, UK: SAGE.

King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in Qualitative Research*. London, UK: Sage.

Kira, M., & Balkin, D. B. (2014). Interactions between work and identities: Thriving, withering or redefining the self? *Human Resource Management Review, 24*, 131-143.

Knights, D., & Clarke, C. A. (2014). It's a bittersweet symphony, this life: Fragile academic selves and insecure identities at work. *Organization Studies, 35*(3), 335-357.

Knights, D., & McCabe, D. (2003). Governing through teamwork: Reconstituting subjectivity in a call centre. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*(7), 1587-1619.

Koerner, M. M. (2014). Courage as identity work: Accounts of workplace courage. *Academy of Management Journal, 57*(1), 63-93.

Korica, M., & Molloy, E. (2010). Making sense of professional identities: Stories of medical professionals and new technologies. *Human Relations, 63*(12), 1879-1901.

Kornberger, M., & Brown, A. D. (2006). 'Ethics' as a discursive resource for identity work. *Human Relations, 60*(3), 497-518.

Kramer, R. M., Brewer, M. B., & Hanna, B. (1996). Collective trust and collective action in organisations: the decision to trust as a social decision. In R. M. Kramer & M. B. Brewer (Eds.), *Trust in Organisations* (pp. 357-389). Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE.

Kreiner, G. E., & Ashforth, B. E. (2004). Evidence towards an expanded model of organisational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 25*, 1-27.

Kreiner, G. E., Hollensbe, E. C., & Sheep, M. L. (2006b). Where is the 'Me' among the 'We'? Identity work and the search for optimal balance. *Academy of Management Journal, 40*(5), 1031-1057.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Laschinger, H. K. S., Purdy, N., Cho, J., & Almost, J. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of nurse managers' perceptions of organizational support. *Nursing Economics, 24*(1), 20-29.

Latour, B. (2000). When things strike back: A possible contribution of "science studies" to the social sciences. *British Journal of Sociology, 51*, 107-123.

Lee, J., & Taylor, M. S. (2014). Dual roles in psychological contracts: When managers take both agent and principal roles. *Human Resource Management Review, 24*, 95-107.

Leonard, P. (2003). 'Playing' doctors and nurses? Competing discourses of gender, power and identity on the British National Health Service. *The Sociological Review, 51*(2), 218-237.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Levi-Strauss, C. (1983). *The Raw and the Cooked* (J. Weightman & D. Weightman, Trans. Vol. I). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lewins, A. (2008). Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed., pp. 394-419). London, UK: SAGE.

Lloyd, C., & Payne, J. (2014). 'It's all hands-on, even for management': Managerial work in the UK cafe sector. *Human Relations, 67*(4), 465-488.

Luhrmann, T., & Eberl, P. (2007). Leadership and identity construction: Reframing the leader-follower interaction from an identity theory perspective. *Leadership, 3*(1), 115-127.

Macdonald, K. (2008). Using documents. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed., pp. 285-303). London, UK: SAGE.

MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After Virtue: A study in moral theory*. Paris: University of Notre Dame Press.

Mallett, O., & Wapshott, R. (2012). Mediating ambiguity: Narrative identity and knowledge workers. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(4), 16-26.

Mantere, S. (2008). Role expecrations and middle manager strategic agency. *Journal of Management Studies, 45*(2), 294-316.

Marks, A., & Thompson, P. (2010). Beyond the blank slate: Identities and interests at work. In P. Thompson & C. Smith (Eds.), *Working Life: Renewing labour process analysis* (pp. 316-338). Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Markus, H., & Wurf, E. (1987). The dynamic self-concept: A social psychology perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology, 38*, 299-337.

Mason, C., & Royce, M. (2007). Fit for purpose - Board development for social enterprise. *Journal of Finance and Management in Public Services, 6*(3), 57-67.

Maybin, J. (2001). Language, struggle and voice: The Bakhtin/Volosinov writings. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader* (pp. 64-71). London, UK: SAGE.

McAdams, D. P. (1985). *Power, Intimacy and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity*. New York: Guilford Press.

McAdams, D. P. (2008). Personal narratives and the life story. In O. P. John, R. W. Robins & L. A. Pervin (Eds.), *Handbook of Personality* (3rd ed., pp. 242-262). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

McAdams, D. P., Josselson, R., & Lieblich, A. (2006). Introduction. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 3-11). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

McConville, T. (2006). Devolved HRM responsibilities, middle managers and role dissonance. *Personnel Review, 35*(6), 637-653.

McConville, T., & Holden, L. (1999). The filling in the sandwich: HRM and middle managers in the health sector. *Personnel Review, 28*(5), 406-424.

McDermott, M. (2007). Mixed messages: Housing Associations and corporate governance. *Social and Legal Studies, 16*(1), 71-79.

McDonald, R., Rogers, A., & Macdonald, W. (2008). Dependence and identity: nurses and chronic conditions in a primary care setting. *Journal of Health Organization and Management, 22*(5), 294-308.

McGivern, G., Currie, G., Ferlie, E., Fitzgerald, L., & Waring, J. (2015). Hybrid manager-professionals' identity work: The maintenance and hybridization of medical professionalism in managerial contexts. *Public Administration, 93*(2), 412-432.

McGurk, P. (2009). Developing 'middle leaders' in the public services? The realities of management and leadership development for public managers. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 22*(6), 464-477.

McInnes, P., & Corlett, S. (2012). Conversational identity work in everyday interaction. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 28*(4), 27-38.

McKenna, S. (2010). Managerial narratives: a critical dialogical approach to managerial identity. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management, 5*(1), 5-27.

McKenna, S., Garcia-Lorenzo, L., & Bridgman, T. (2010). Managing, managerial control and managerial identity in the post-bureaucratic world. *Journal of Management Development, 29*(2), 128-136.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Meyer, J. P., Becker, T. E., & Van Dick, R. (2006). Social Identities and commitments at work: toward an integrative model. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 27*(5), 665-683.

Miller, J., & Glassner, B. (2010). The "inside" and the "outside": Finding realities in interviews. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative Method: Theory, Method, Practice* (3rd ed., pp. 131-148). London, UK: Sage.

Mischel, W., & Morf, C. C. (2003). The self as a psycho-social dynamic processing system: A meta-perspective on a century of the self in psychology. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 15-43). New York: The Guilford Press.

Mischenko, J. (2005). Exhausting management work: conflicting identities. *Journal of Health Organization and Management, 19*(3), 204-218.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research Interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Motion, J., & Leitch, S. (2009). The transformational potential of public policy discourse. *Organization Studies, 30*(10), 1045-1061.

Mueller, F., & Whittle, A. (2013). Villains, victims and the financial crisis: Positioning identities through descriptions. In M. Schultz, S. Maguire, A. Langley & H. Tsoukas (Eds.), *Constructing Identity In and Around Organizations* (pp. 147-179). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murakami, K., Murray, L., Sims, D., & Chedzey, K. (2009). Learning on work placement: The narrative development of social competence. *Journal of Adult Development, 16*(13-24).

Murphy, E., & Dingwell, R. (2001). The ethics of ethnography. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland & L. Lofland (Eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography* (pp. 339-351). London, UK: SAGE.

Musson, G., & Duberley, J. (2007). Change, change or be exchanged: The discourse of participation and the manufacture of identity. *Journal of Management Studies, 44*(1), 143-164.

National Housing Federation. (2013). About Housing Associations Retrieved 7 June, 2013, from http://www.housing.org.uk/about-us/about-the-federation/about-housing-associations/

Ogbonna, E., & Wilkinson, B. (2003). The false promise of organisationl change culture: A case study of middle managers in grocery retailing. *Journal of Management Studies, 40*(5), 1151-1178.

Oldenhof, L., Postma, J., & Putters, K. (2013). On justification work: How compromising enables public sector managers to deal with conflicting values. *Public Administration Review, 74*(1), 52-63.

Pals, J. L. (2006). Constructing the "springboard effect": Causal connections, self-making and growth within the life story. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 175-199). Washington, DC: Americal Psychological Association.

Parker, I. (1992). *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Individual and Social Psychology*. London, UK: Routledge.

Parry, K. W., & Hansen, H. (2007). The organizational story as leadership. *Leadership, 3*(3), 281-300.

Pasupathi, M. (2006). Silk from sows' ears: Collaborative construction of everyday selves in everyday stories. In D. P. McAdams, R. Josselson & A. Lieblich (Eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating self in narrative* (pp. 129-150). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oakes, CA: SAGE.

Pawson, H., & Smith, R. (2009). Second generation stock transfers in Britain: impacts on social housing governance and organisational culture. *International Journal of Housing Policy, 9*(4), 411-433.

Pedersen, D., & Hartley, J. (2008). The changing context of public leadership and management: Implications for roles and dynamics. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 21*(4), 327-339.

Pedler, M., Burgoyne, J., & Boydell, T. (2007). *A Manager's Guide to Self Development* (5th ed.). Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill.

Pelz, D. (1952). Influence: A key to effective leadership in the first-line supervisor. *Personnel 29*, 209-217.

Peters, T., & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's best run companies*. New York: Harper & Row.

Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review*, *29*(4), 635-652.

Phoenix, A. (1994). Practising feminist research: The intersection of gender and race in the research process. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective* (pp. 49-71). London, UK: Taylor and Francis.

Phoenix, C., Smith, B., & Sparkes, A. (2010). Narrative analysis in aging studies: A typology for consideration. *Journal of Aging Studies, 24*, 1-11.

Plummer, K. (1995). *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, change and social worlds*. London, UK: Routledge.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1987). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.

Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London, UK: SAGE.

Pratt, M. G. (2000). The good, the bad and the ambivalent: Managing identification among Amway distributers. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 45*(3), 456-493.

Pratt, M. G., & Corley, K. G. (2007). Managing multiple organisational identities: On identity ambiguity, identity conflict and members' reactions. In C. A. Bartel, S. L. Blader & A. Wrzesniewski (Eds.), *Identity and the Modern Organisation* (pp. 99-118). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Pratt, M. G., & Foreman, P. O. (2000). Classifying managerial responses to multiple organisation identities. *Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 18-42.

Pratt, M. G., Rockman, K. W., & Kaufman, J. B. (2006). Constructing professional identity: The role of work and identity learning cycles in the customization of identity among medical residents. *Academy of Management Journal, 49*(2), 235-262.

Preece, D., & Ward, C. (2012). Union leadership in UK social housing. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 33*(8), 763-778.

Propp, V. (1968). *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (2nd ed.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Pye, A. (2005). Leadership and organizing: Sensemaking in action. *Leadership, 1*(1), 31-50.

Raes, A. M. L., Glunk, U., Heijltjes, M. G., & Roe, R. A. (2007). Top management team and middle managers: Making sense of leadership. *Small Group Research, 38*(3), 360-386.

Raes, A. M. L., Heijltjes, M. G., Glunk, U., & Roe, R. A. (2011). The interface of the top management team and middle managers: A process model. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(1), 102-126.

Reedy, P. (2009). *The Manager's Tale: Stories of managerial identity*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.

Reitzes, D. C., & Mutran, E. J. (1994). Multiple roles and identities: Factors influencing self-esteem among middle-aged working men and women. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 57*(4), 313-325.

Rhodes, C., & Brown, A. D. (2005). Narrative, organisations and research. *International Journal of Management Reviews, 7*(3), 167-188.

Riantoputra, C. D. (2009). Know thyself: Examining factors that influence the activation of organisational identity concepts in top managers' minds. *Group & Organization Management, 35*(8), 8-38.

Ricoeur, P. (1971). The model and the text: Meaningful action considered as a text. *Social Research, 38*, 529-562.

Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (J. B. Thompson, Trans.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ridder, H.-G., Hoon, C., & McCandless Baluch, A. (2014). Entering a dialogue: Positioning case study findings towards theory. *British Journal of Management, 25*, 373-387.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Riketta, M., & Nienaber, S. (2007). Multiple identities and work motivation: The role of perceived compatibility between nested organisational units. *British Journal of Management, 18*(Mar2007 supplement), 61-77.

Riley, T., & Hawe, P. (2005). Researching practice: the methodological case for narrative inquiry. *Health Education Research, 20*(2), 226-236.

Roberts, L. M. (2005). Changing faces: Professional image construction in diverse organisational settings. *Academy of Management Review, 30*(4), 685-711.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Roccas, S., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). Social identity complexity. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6*(2), 88-106.

Rosile, G. A., Boje, D. M., Carlon, D. M., Downs, A., & Saylors, R. (2013). Storytelling Diamond: An antenarrative intergation of the six facets of storytelling in organization research design. *Organizational Research Methods, 16*(4), 557-580.

Rousseau, D. M. (1998). Why workers still identify with organisations. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour, 19*(3), 217-233.

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2005). *Qualitative Interviewing: The art of hearing data* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Rumens, N. (2011). Minority support: Friendship and the development of lesbian and gay managerial careers and identities. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, 30*(6), 444-462.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2003). On assimilating identities to the self: a self-determination theory perspective on internalisation and integrity within cultures. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 253-272). New York: The Guilford Press.

Sachdev, I., & Bourhis, R. Y. (2006). Power and status differentials in minority and majority group relations. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 21*(1), 1-24.

Sanger, J. (1996). *The Compleat Observer? A field research guide to observation*. London, UK: The Falmer Press.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2007). *Research methods for Business Students* (4th ed.). Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall.

Schlenker, B. R. (2003). Self-presentation. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 492-518). New York: The Guilford Press.

Seijts, G. H., & Roberts, M. (2011). The impact of employee perceptions on change in a municipal government. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 32*(2), 190-213.

Seyle, D. C., & Swann Jr., W. B. (2007). Being oneself in the workplace: Self-verification and identity in organisational contexts. In C. A. Bartel, S. L. Blader & A. Wrzesniewski (Eds.), *Identity and the Modern Organisation* (pp. 201-222). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shamir, B., Zakay, E., Breinin, E., & Popper, M. (1998). Correlates of charismatic leader behaviour in military units: Subordinates' attitudes, unit characteristics and superiors' appraisals of leader performance. *Academy of Management Journal, 41*(4), 387-409.

Shaw, J. (2010). Papering the cracks with discourse: The narrative identity of the authentic leader. *Leadership, 6*(1), 89-108.

Sheard, A. G., & Kakabadse, A. P. (2007). A role-based perspective on leadership decision taking. *Journal of Management Development, 26*(6), 520-622.

Sheard, G., Kakabadse, A. P., & Kakabadse, N. K. (2011). Organisational politics: reconciling leadership's rational-emotional paradox. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 32*(1), 78-97.

Siggelkow, N. (2007). Persuasion with case studies. *Academy of Management Journal, 50*(1), 20-24.

Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (3rd ed.). London, UK: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (4th ed.). London, UK: SAGE.

Simons, H. (2009). *Case Study Research in Practice*. London, UK: SAGE.

Simpson, B., & Carroll, B. (2008). Re-viewing 'role' in processes of identity construction. *Organization, 15*(1), 29-50.

Sims, D. (2003). Between the millstones: A narrative account of the vulnerability of middle managers' storying. *Human Relations, 56*(10), 1195-1211.

Sims, D. (2005a). You bastard: A narrative exploration of the experience of indignation within organisations. *Organization Studies, 26*(11), 1625-1640.

Sims, D. (2005b). Living a story and storying a life. In A. Pullen & S. Linstead (Eds.), *Organization and Identity* (pp. 86-104). Abingdon: Routledge.

Sims, D. (2008). Managerial identity formation in a public sector professional: an autobiographical account. *International Journal of Public Administration, 31*, 988-1002.

Sinclair, A. (2010). Placing self: how might we place ourselves in leadership studies differently? *Leadership, 6*(4), 447-460.

Sinkovics, R., & Alfoldi, E. (2012). Facilitating the interaction between theory and data in qualitative research using CAQDAS. In G. Symon & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organisational research: Core methods and current challenges* (pp. 109-131). London: SAGE.

Slay, H. S., & Smith, D. A. (2011). Professional identity construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations, 64*(1), 85-107.

Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2007). Relational identity and identification: Defining ourselves through work relationships. *Academy of Management Review, 32*(1), 9-32.

Sluss, D. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2008). How relational and organisational identification converge: Processes and conditions. *Organization Science, 19*(6), 807-823.

Smith, W. K., & Lewis, M. W. (2011). Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organizing. *Academy of Management Review, 36*(2), 381-403.

Snow, D. A., & Anderson, L. (1987). Identity work among the homeless: The verbal construction and avowal of personal identities. *American Journal of Sociology, 92*(6), 1336-1371.

Soltani, E., & Wilkinson, A. (2010). Stuck in the middle with you: The effects of senior and middle managers' orientations on TQM programmes. *International Journal of Operations and Production Management, 30*(4), 365-397.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (2008). A deflationary account of metaphors. In R. W. Gibbs (Ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought* (pp. 84-105). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant Observation*. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sprigings, N. (2002). Delivering public services under the New Public Management: The case of public housing. *Public Money and Management, 22*(4), 11-17.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(3), 224-237.

Stewart, R., Barsoux, J.-L., Kieser, A., Ganter, H.-D., & Walgenbach, P. (1994). *Managing in Britain and Germany*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

Strachan, S. M., Flora, P. K., Brawley, L. R., & Spink, K. S. (2011). Varying the cause of a challenge to exercise identity behaviour: Reactions of individuals of differing identity strength. *Journal of Health Psychology, 16*(4), 572-583.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Stryker, S., & Burke, P. J. (2000). The past, present and future of an identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(4), 284-297.

Sturdy, A., Brocklehurst, M., Winstanley, D., & Littlejohns, M. (2006). Management as a (self) confidence trick: Management ideas, education and identity work. *Organization, 13*(6), 841-860.

Sveningsson, S., & Alvesson, M. (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organisational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Journal of Management Development, 56*(10), 1163-1193.

Sveningsson, S., & Larsson, M. (2006). Fantasies of leadership: Identity work. *Leadership, 2*(2), 203-224.

Swann Jr., W. B., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. S. (2003). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In M. R. Leary & J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of Self and Identity* (pp. 367-383). New York: The Guilford Press.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1984). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: The search for meanings* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Wiley.

The Information Commissioner's Office. (2013). For organisations Retrieved 17 June 2013, 2013, from http://www.ico.org.uk/for_organisations

Thomas, G., & James, D. (2006). Reinventing grounded theory: some questions about theory, ground and discovery. *British Educational Research Journal, 32*(6), 767-795.

Thomas, R., & Davies, A. (2005). Theorizing the micro-politics of resistance. *Organization Studies, 26*(5), 683-706.

Thomas, R., & Linstead, A. (2002). Losing the plot? Middle managers and identity. *Organization, 9*(1), 71-93.

Thornborrow, T., & Brown, A. D. (2009). "Being regimented": Aspiration, discipline and identity work in the British Parachute Regiment. *Organization Studies*, 355-376.

Thurlow, A., & Helms Mills, J. (2009). Change, talk and sensemaking. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 22*(5), 459-479.

Tomlinson, F., & Colgan, F. (2014). Negotiating the self between past and present: Narratives of older women moving towards self-employment. *Organization Studies, 35*(11), 1655-1675.

Tompkins, P. K., & Cheney, G. (1985). Communication and unobtrusive control in contemporary organisations. In R. D. McPhee & P. K. Tompkins (Eds.), *Organizational Communication: Traditional themes and new directions* (pp. 179-210). Beverley Hills, CA: SAGE.

Turner, J. C. (1975). Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 5*, 5-34.

Van Knippenberg, D., Van Knippenberg, B., De Cremer, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2004). Leadership, self and identity: A review and research agenda. *The Leadership Quarterly, 15*(6), 825-856.

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching Lived Experience* (2nd ed.). Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.

Veal, A. J. (2005). *Business Research Methods: A managerial approach*. Frenchs Forest, Aus.: Pearson Education

Vigoda-Gadot, E. (2007). Leadership style, organisational politics and employees' performance. *Personnel Review, 36*(5), 661-683.

Vilkinas, T., Cartan, G., & Piron, S. (1994). Performance determinants for senior managers: Rhetoric or reality? *Leadership and Organization Development Journal, 15*(6), 24-32.

Vološinov, V. N. (1929/1973/1994). Marxism and the philosophy of language (L. Matejka & I. R. Titunik, Trans.). In P. Morris (Ed.), *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Vološinov* (pp. 50-61). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Voronov, M., Wolfram Cox, J., LeTrent-Jones, T., & Weir, D. (2009). In J. Wolfram Cox, T. G. LeTrent-Jones, M. Voronov & D. Weir (Eds.), *Critical management studies at work: Negotiating tensions between theory and practice* (pp. 1-14). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Waddington, D. (2004). Participant observation. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research* (pp. 154-164). London, UK: SAGE.

Warhurst, R. (2011). Managers' practice and managers' learning as identity formation: Reassessing the MBA contribution. *Management Learning, 42*(3), 261-278.

Waring, J., & Currie, G. (2009). Managing expert knowledge: Organisational challenges and managerial futures for the UK medical profession. *Organization Studies, 30*(7), 755-778.

Watson, T. J. (1994). Managing, crafting and researching:Words, skill and imagination in shaping management research. *British Journal of Management, 5*( Special issue), 77-87.

Watson, T. J. (1995). Shaping the story: Rhetoric, persuasion and creative writing in organizational ethnography. *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies, 1*, 301-311.

Watson, T. J. (1997). The labour of division: the manager as 'self' and 'other'. In K. Hetherington & R. Munro (Eds.), *Ideas of Difference* (pp. 139-152). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Watson, T. J. (2000). *In Search of Management* (revised ed ed.). London, UK: Thomson Learning.

Watson, T. J. (2001). The emergent manager and processes of management pre-learning. *Management Learning, 32*(2), 221-235.

Watson, T. J. (2008). Managing identity: Identity work, personal predicaments and structural circumstances. *Organization 15*(1), 121-143.

Watson, T. J. (2009). Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 425-452.

Webb, J. (2006). *Organisations, Identities and the Self*. London, UK: Palgrave.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organisations*. London, UK: SAGE.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization Science, 16*(4), 409-421.

Weigert, A. J., & Gecas, V. (2003). Self. In L. T. Reynolds & N. J. Herman-Kinney (Eds.), *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (pp. 267-288). Walnut Creek, CA: Altimira Press.

Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured method*. London, UK: Sage.

Wertsch, J. (2001). The multivoicedness of meaning. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor & S. J. Yates (Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice: A reader* (pp. 222-235). London, UK: SAGE.

Wertsch, J. (2013). Narrative tools and the construction of identity. In M. Schultz, S. Maguire, A. Langley & H. Tsoukas (Eds.), *Constructing Identity In and Around Organizations* (pp. 128-146). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Whetten, D. A. (2007). A critique of organisational identity scholarship: Challenging the uncritical use of social identity theory when social identities are also social actors. In C. A. Bartel, S. L. Blader & A. Wrzesniewski (Eds.), *Identity and the Modern Organisation* (pp. 253-272). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Whittle, A., & Mueller, F. (2011). Bankers in the dock: Moral storytelling in action. *Human Relations, 65*(1), 111-139.

Whittle, A., Mueller, F., Lenney, P., & Gilchrist, A. (2014). Interest-talk as access-talk: How interests are displayed, made and down-played in management research. *British Journal of Management, 25*, 607-628.

Whittle, A., Mueller, F., & Mangan, A. (2009). Storytelling and 'character': Victims, villains and heroes in a case of technological change. *Organization, 16*(3), 425-442.

Wooffitt, R. (2008). Conversation analysis and discourse analysis. In N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching Social Life* (3rd ed., pp. 440-461). London, UK: SAGE.

Ybema, S., Keenoy, T., Oswick, C., Beverungen, A., Ellis, N., & Sabelis, I. (2009). Articulating identities. *Human Relations, 62*(3), 299-322.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Zaccaro, S. J., & Klimoski, R. (2001). The nature of organisational leadership: An introduction. In S. J. Zaccaro & R. Klimoski (Eds.), *The Nature of Organisational Leadership: Understanding the performance imperatives confronting today's leaders* (pp. 3-41). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

# Appendix 1 – Interviews

## Appendix 1A – Interview schedule

| **Stage 1 – background information** |
|---|
| Could you confirm your current job title?<br><br>*Confirm position in organisational chart*<br>*Confirm how many people you usually manage* |
| How long have you worked in the organisation overall? |
| How long have you been in this particular job role? |
| Could you tell me briefly how you came to be in this role?<br><br>*What was your main motivation for applying?*<br>*What influenced you in deciding to apply?*<br>*Has the role changed since you have been in post?* |
| At the present moment, what do you want in your future career?<br><br>*Do you see yourself seeking promotion?*<br>*Do you see yourself staying with the organisation?*<br>*Do you see yourself leaving if a better opportunity arose elsewhere?* |
| **Stage 2 – the medial manager story** |
| I would now like you to tell me your story, which you feel captures what your role in the organisation means to you. Please start whenever you are ready, and take as much time as you need. I will just listen, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes for afterwards. |
| **Stage 3 – exploring the story** |
| **Possible questions about the story**<br><br>*Context of the story*<br>• *Checking understanding of events*<br>• *Checking the nature of events – e.g. a one-off or common occurrence?*<br><br>*Feelings about the story*<br>• *Checking understanding of the meaning of events and of the story*<br><br>*Organisational actors in the story* |

- *Checking understanding of the roles and actions they perform*
- *Feelings about these actors?*
- *Feelings about their roles and actions?*

*Organisational actors who did not feature*

- *Feelings about these actors?*
- *Are they significant to the medial manager? In what way?*

**Possible questions about the storyteller**

*Why did you choose this story?*

*What do you feel this story says about your role in the organisation?*

- *What do you think your role is?*
- *What are you really there for?*

*How have you come to this understanding of your role?*

- *What has influenced you?*
- *Has your view of your current role changed over time?*
- *If so, can you say what has caused this change?*

*Do you think this view of your role is shared by others?*

- *Peers; staff; line manager; senior managers?*
- *How do you think others see your role?*
- *Are you aware of differing expectations of you and your role? (Example?)*
- *How easy is it for you to perform your role as you understand it to be?*

## Appendix 1B – Transcription system

| Interview feature | Representation |
|---|---|
| Emphasis | *"We bring <u>them</u> in as well, get <u>their</u> ideas, <u>their</u> knowledge base."* |
| Pauses | Very short pauses as comma:<br>*"What we done was, we split the teams so that anybody who was, say, in my peer group, I wasn't their direct manager"*<br><br>Longer pauses as (p) and (pause):<br>*"it was, really I suppose, sort of (pause) I suppose a slap in the face (pause) <u>but</u> (pause) it's what you do from that point"*<br><br>NB commas are not used where there is no pause in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | the interviewee talk:<br>*"And there was an element of psychology in a sense of this notion of any organisation only being as good as the people that it employs and one of the things that I said to people was that if that is true then if we're good we're good because you're good."* |
| Interruptions or abrupt end to train of thought | Interruption shown by a hyphen:<br>*"The more I've said it - the more I've sold it, the more I've said it, the better it makes sense really"*<br><br>Int: *I think I heard you correctly, it was difficult just to pick one -*<br>V *- Yeah, yeah.* |
| Laughing, coughing and similar features | Noted within round brackets:<br>*"you learn from these things don't you as well, I'm still here (laughs) I've survived the process."* |
| Von-verbal sounds e.g. erm | Generally removed for clarity. |
| Text removed for clarity or sense | Missing text represented by ...<br>*"There is a lot of collaborative working...we all work really well together, it's a very strong team."* |
| Text removed to protect identity or otherwise sensitive information | Missing text or replacement text represented by [ ]<br>*"<u>but</u> you go [ ] yeah, what would <u>you</u> do? And they go, fair enough. You know, you spin it back round to them and say yeah, you know, you [do this job], what would you do?"* |

## Appendix 1C – Interview excerpt

This excerpt has been selected as an illustration of the interview transcripts used in the analysis; as an example of the interactions between the researcher and the interviewee, through which a particular social reality was constructed; and as an example of a particularly clear case of the interviewee recognising and drawing attention to the occasion of a research interview. The excerpt begins after Varley has been telling their two chosen stories.

---

Int Yes, yes (pause...). Ok, so (p) as I said I gave you free range to pick any story that you wanted to and you said, and I think I heard you correctly, it was difficult just to pick one -

V - Yeah, yeah.

Int So I guess now I'd like to try and explore a little bit more about what made you choose this story to represent you in the organisation.

V Yeah. I don't know (pause). I suppose integrity (p) maybe (p) I don't know. (pause...) You know, and s- (pause) being prepared to stand up for what's right, I think maybe that's (p) something in there as well (p) erm (p) you know (p) and being to be able to put your neck on the line if necessary and argue for what's, erm, for what's correct, I don't know, maybe that's something to do with it. I mean, the other story I was thinking about was when somebody was particularly ill (p) and I got a call on the way to work. Now, you know, that sent me off on a tangent [ ] but (p) I mean once again that was doing the right thing, it was

(pause) [ ] you know, their distress and that side-lined me for that day, and erm (p) that was because the person was very sick at the time, that was a very significant, erm, you know, event, you know, again. It – so, erm - It was difficult really, you should have given us a few examples really, it was kind of throwing it out there and then I'm thinking what's she trying to figure out from this, what she's trying to unearth here, what's behind it.

Int Ah, you see that's why I didn't want to give you too much direction because I didn't want you to try and anticipate what [ ].

V So then you think what's she going to gain from that, what can she see (pause). Yeah. (pause) It's – it's tricky isn't it really. I mean I could have gone down the route of, you know, supervision (p) or motivation or (p) you know, the coaching side of what I do, you know it's - or when we went through a lean process where all the processes and everything were changed and how we changed what we did and how that process is ongoing and, you know, I work on that all the time, there's lots of things really.

Int Yes and obviously it's almost impossible to summarise the complexity of all the things you do in the organisation.

V Yeah, to sum up one thing, as a story, is difficult.

Int But I guess, as I said, when I asked you why you talked about integrity,

V Yeah

Int doing the right thing -

V - yeah

Int - which, and again I don't want to try and put words into your mouth, but you talked about doing the right thing by the individual who had actually outperformed everyone else although they didn't have the experience, then you talked about doing the right thing, there's a formal process, I think you said?

V Yeah

Int and it’s important to follow that and then the story that you might have told as an alternative,

V Yeah

Int doing the right thing -

V [overlaps] yeah

Int [overlaps] - by that staff member even though it…

V Well to be honest, on that one...

# Appendix 2 – Reflective journal

The following excerpts are selected to illustrate particular significant issues and events during the research process, and also as examples of how the act of starting to write a factual account develops into more reflective and reflexive insights.

**Excerpt 1 – organisational access and professional credibility**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Reflections** | Interesting background to [Panorama] – [CEO] has had previous researchers – largely Masters – at [Panorama] as well as multiple auditors, so staff are very used to being interviewed – not necessarily a problem, but good to be aware – esp in context of interview culture, interview performance etc.<br><br>[CEO] also had quite clear views as to how his managers would react to the research and aspects of it e.g. the consent forms – although he qualified it more than once by saying "but that's only my opinion". As well as the consent form he queried how comfortable managers would be being observed and whether it would be perceived as being testing or checking on their performance – as well as the issue of performing for the observer... More generally "they will see you as an academic who is testing and assessing their management skills".<br><br>[...]<br><br>In many ways [CEO] is an ideal gatekeeper – not only the CEO who is wholly supportive of the project but also an academic student who values organisational research and who can offer his own views and insights into my methods etc. But I need to be careful not to be either overawed or become defensive in this context – he is not a threat to me as a researcher (or a former manager) but a potential critical friend and someone who is interested in the research and its outcomes. I need to be able to listen to his views and evaluate them – but be prepared to make my own decisions.<br><br>Threat in this context refers not only to my ability to carry out the research that I have planned, but more widely my identity as a competent academic researcher. Indeed, the two are interconnected – if I am worried about my identity as a researcher there is a risk that I will compromise my research by adapting to what I perceive as his view of the right way of doing things. Particular issues and (currently relatively small) fears that I became aware of during the meeting were: not being wholly academic but practical as well – I made a point of emphasising my hopes for the theoretical model to be useful to organisations; being |

| | |
|---|---|
| | sufficiently experienced and knowledgeable as a former manager; being sufficiently knowledgeable of academic literature and practice (so the feedback around the consent forms was challenging); not being seen as an annoyance or irrelevance – and especially not producing any research which would be of interest. |
| **Development points** | Consider a recorded interview with [CEO], exploring what he ideally wants from managers?<br><br>Taking [CEO]'s concerns into account – I need to take every opportunity to frame the research in terms of understanding what managers do – rather than what they ought to do – and especially the observations in terms of the whole environment rather than the focus being on the individual manager.<br><br>Dress code – my "academic" dress of smart trousers and shirt is probably about right – certainly not the suit which would presumably reinforce a perception of an external management audit... |

**Excerpt 2 – a challenging interview and challenges to pre-conceptions**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Reflections** | I found this a difficult interview. There was an initial challenge in that [ ] had not received my email and information sheet, so had been unable to prepare a story in advance. However, he indicated he could think of something there and then, and the meaning of the story he told seemed to be consistent with his overall understanding of his role.<br><br>Overall, I felt that I failed to "connect" sufficiently in terms of getting the kind of answers I was hoping for. I tried a number of different ways to explore his understanding of his role as Team Leader and relations with his own manager and the team, but couldn't get anything really concrete.<br><br>I was left having some difficulty making sense of his position in terms of the MMIM [the interpretative framework of medial manager identity, the working conceptual model at the time of writing].<br><br>Driving home I felt increasingly uncertain about the project and worried that I was not collecting the right kind of data to answer my research question. These grew into fears that:<br><br>• The approach to collecting data is all wrong<br>• The organisation is wrong because my model is predicated on differences between top and bottom and there are no differences in [Panorama] |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • I would collect a lot of interesting data but have to completely re-write or reconceptualise the literature<br>• I would have to abandon the interpretative framework of MMI<br><br>These fears still remain but I now feel that I can put them in some perspective:<br><br>• The interview with [ ] may reveal more useful data than I have realised<br>• I can always re-interview him (and others) if I feel I have gained a better understanding of the organisational context or better ways of asking him about his position in terms of hierarchy<br>• It does seem the case that Panorama is not strongly hierarchical – indeed I am starting to pick up quite a degree of involvement by second-tier managers with staff – which may make the TL position challenging. This is something I can check and explore a little more with the [ ] Director on Thursday. Therefore the challenge may be to see how the model fits or needs to be adapted in the context of a flatter and more fluid organisational structure.<br>• I need to realise that the process of research is going to be iterative and circular rather than linear. I recall my MBA dissertation as going smoothly from literature to theory to data to demonstrating theory – but I think I was perhaps less certain at first that the model was applicable, and certainly dependent on a close reading of the texts. Perhaps I had not realised how much I was expecting everything to fall neatly into place, rather than be prepared to wrestle with the data (the "is" rather than the "predicted") and make sense of it in its own terms as well as in a theoretical context.<br>• The MMIM will certainly need to be developed and made more flexible to accommodate a variety of nuances and gradations – and perhaps subtle shifts between positions. But this is something that will evolve as you begin to interrogate and make sense of the data.<br>• Don't forget that the MMIM works both ways... you may get a sense of a particular position... or you may look at the kinds of identity work that is going on, and infer what kind of position is being adopted. |
| | I have come back to this again.<br><br>In the methodology chapters I wrote all about letting the data be "disobedient", the reflexive iteration between the data and my pre-conceptions, and the importance of tests of coherence and authenticity. However, when it came to it I found myself devastated when my pet theory seemed to be challenged by the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | interviewee. The more I think about it, the more I think this is not just a fear of having to re-think my theoretical model – the more I am interviewing and making initial notes on the interviews the more I am confident that I am gathering some really rich and interesting data – whether it not it will neatly fit into my pre-conceived model. My real difficulty is in being prepared to let go of my "clever idea". I have an emotional investment in it and I want it to work.<br><br>At this moment, having not started any detailed coding, I do not know whether the model will stand up or not. I think it might, based on an intuitive reading of the interviews – but now I am becoming aware of the dangers of trying to "make it work". I am starting to accept the possibility that it might not, and that my research will still be interesting and worthwhile – and that I will be a better researcher for being able to let go of my beautiful idea – even if it turns out to hold. |